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Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism is essential to counteracting the downward trend of morality, religious affiliation, and church growth in America. In the church where discipleship and fulfilling the Great Commission is becoming more of an option versus a necessity, the fruit of unintentional discipleship has contributed to the transformation of America into an age of moral relativism with no end in sight unless the church reverts to its first love of the Great Commission. The project will accentuate the statistics that demonstrate the current statistical decline of church attendance in the western world and explain how a combination of moral relativism and a lack of teaching intentional discipleship led to the overall decline of the church in America within the past twenty years. Furthermore, this thesis will define discipleship, describe what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, prove from the Scriptures that discipleship is not optional but obligatory, and explain the necessity of fulfilling the Great Commission as the only true beacon of righteous conversion. Then the thesis will transition to the action-based portion of the research by testing the effects of teaching a Gospel-centered course on intentional discipleship. Lastly, the thesis will annotate the results from the questionnaires and conclude on the effects of teaching intentional discipleship and whether the course equipped the participants as true disciples who can make disciples by running against the wind of moral relativism.

Abstract Length: 238 Words
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In a moral relativistic age where secularism and post-postmodernism continues to rise and dictate the direction of American culture, the effect has contributed to the spiritual and statistical degradation of church membership, attendance, and religious affiliation across the country. According to a 2019 Gallup news report, church membership among American adults from the age of 18-29 have seen a twenty percent decline within the past twenty years, which is an alarming statistic.\(^1\) This statistic is further confirmed by the Pew Research Center that only thirty-six percent attend church once a week, thirty-three percent attend church once or twice a month, while a whopping thirty percent rarely or never go to church.\(^2\) Just twenty years ago, ninety percent of Americans identified with some kind of religious affiliation, and now, only seventy-seven percent of the American population identify as religious. Interestingly, there has also been a twenty-three percent decline in religious affiliation among those who identify with the Democratic Party and a nineteen percent decline among those who carry a liberal ideology, which are two of the most significant drops contained in the Gallup report. Then in another recent account released by the Gallup report in March 2021, “The proportion of Americans who consider themselves members of a church, synagogue or mosque has dropped below 50 percent. It is the first time that has happened since Gallup first asked the question in 1937, when church membership was 73 percent.”\(^3\) This regression of church membership and religious affiliation


even among political lines in America is occurring rapidly despite the efforts of the seeker-sensitive movement and the emergent church whose philosophy is primarily centered on a pragmatic approach of attracting non-believers to the church utilizing a variety of methods that desensitize orthodox and traditional Christianity.

Hence, the question that remains to be answered is why are the above statistics regarding the current status of the church in America gradually declining? How did America arrive to such an immoral place in her culture and society? Why, despite the efforts of the mega church has there been a sharp decline in church growth and religious affiliation in the United States? Could this reduction reflect the teachings of the church, or the lack thereof? Has the church minimized the essential doctrine of true discipleship and the Great Commission in a contemporary age where everything is optional and steadily evolving? How crucial is the charge of the Great Commission in an age where truth has become relative? Has the church somehow unknowingly conformed to the patterns of the world and capitulated to the culture? If so, how can the church get back on track and be intentional with teaching discipleship and proclaim the Gospel fervently in an age of moral relativism? How can the local church at *Christian Way Ministries* in which this research will concentrate its efforts lead by example in countering the spirit of relativism? These are some of the questions this thesis project will attempt to answer throughout its research.

In anticipation, the first chapter will discuss the ministry context in which this project will conduct its research, illustrate the statement of problem concerning the church in America, outline some basic assumptions and definitions, underline the limitations and delimitations of the project, and conclude chapter one with the thesis statement. The second chapter will set its attention on the framework of the entire project, review the literature implemented throughout the research, describe the emergence of moral relativism in America, and provide the theological and theoretical foundations of discipleship and the Great Commission that will set the tone for
the ensuing research. In the third chapter, the methodology of how this research will be applied and tested will be the primary focal point. This section will address specific details regarding the implementation of the applied research and how it will conduct the eight-week course on *Teaching Intentional Discipleship*. Then chapter four will annotate the results from the action-based research in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the methodology and determine if there is any correlation gathered from the research to the statement of problem. Lastly, chapter five will provide concluding thoughts on the results from the action-based research and emphasize the urgency the church needs to teach intentional discipleship, proclaim the Gospel, and fulfill the Great Commission in an age of moral relativism.

**Ministry Context: Christian Way Ministries**

In regard to the ministry context of *Christian Way Ministries* located in Virginia Beach, Virginia there exists several misconceptions regarding what it means to be a Christian, what the Gospel of Jesus Christ consists of, what the church is supposed to be about, and how to exercise the Great Commission in today’s contemporary culture. In an age of moral relativism in America where a myriad of options are available to pick and choose from, this optional spirit has unfortunately permeated the walls of the church and deceived many of the saints into believing that they can also select which aspects of the Gospel to observe. Additionally, with the enormous pool of churches to attend within the local communities, church-hopping has become commonplace, which in turn hinders certain churches from exercising the Great Commission to its full potential because there is more of an emphasis on trying to fill pews, provide a certain emotional experience, and trying to maintain the overhead of the church versus preaching the biblical Gospel. According to the research cited by Malphurs and Penfold in their book, *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church*, there are approximately 400,000 churches across the United States, and “84 percent (of the churches for which they have data for) are
declining or experiencing a growth rate below the population growth rate for their communities.”

This is especially true in the context of Christian Way Ministries where church growth is stagnant to slowly incremental despite intentional efforts to evangelize, to preach the biblical Gospel, and teach intentional discipleship. Part of the issue pertains to the plethora of churches available within the local communities to the extent that the church in America has become a taste-test venue. People hop from one church to another until they find one that checks their box of credentials, and those churches which have not catered to the post-postmodern culture will more than likely experience little to no growth. Unfortunately, Western Christianity has become more about pragmatism, attracting people with fancy buildings, concert-like praise and worship, and preaching motivational sermons rather than teaching the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ, the eternal importance of discipleship along with the Great Commission. When there are other churches in the local community just around the corner who are teaching a diluted version of the Gospel with little to no emphasis on repentance, obtaining spiritual maturity, making disciples, or fulfilling the Great Commission, it puts the other local churches who are truly invested in mimicking the first-century biblical church in a conundrum. What is the church to do? Should the church teach and preach a biblical message, or should the church succumb to the pattern of “Western Christianity,” and cater to the culture in order to tickle the ears of the people with a message they want to hear in hope to maintain membership and accumulate revenue?

For instance, in the local community where Christian Way Ministries is located, there are a minimum of six churches within a one-mile radius alone. The surrounding neighborhoods that are in close proximity to these churches are some of the poorest in economic stature in the entire

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city of Virginia Beach. Sadly, after three years of doing ministry within the local community and after several attempts to partner with other churches, the desire for the local churches to collaborate with one another for the common cause of the Great Commission is practically absent. Each church is grounded in their own denominational bubble, and with the recent spread of the coronavirus, there is even more reason to remain quarantined from fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ. There appears to be no passion to evangelize the local community for several reasons. First, the notion that discipleship along with the Great Commission is an optional component to Christianity or just another church program is a misconception that must be addressed. Bill Hull makes clear in The Complete Book of Discipleship, “The most common mistake made by well-intentioned leaders…, is turning discipleship into a curriculum. Discipleship is fundamentally about the choice to follow Jesus, it needs to be a way of life for all of life.” Secondly, understanding how the church allowed this discretionary version of Christianity to dissuade believers from the true mission of the Gospel is relevant in order to counter this cultural and moral infestation, which must begin at the local level. Lastly, learning how to engage the contemporary context that consists of a multitude of various beliefs spread across a diverse social-economic community is critical in teaching intentional discipleship and empowering believers to exercise their part of the Great Commission. For instance, Christian Way Ministries has encountered atheism, agnosticism, cultural Marxism, proponents of the Woke Gospel, the doctrine of the Hebrew-Israelites, Sabbath Worshippers, Mormons, and the Moorish Science Temple of America just to name a few. Without some minimum knowledge of these particular worldviews and without the local churches coming together in unity regardless of their denominational ties to fulfill the Great Commission and to preach against the ever-evolving

cultural shifts, the prevalent immoralities, and the various cults, it will make countering the age of moral relativism all the more difficult, if not impossible. These deficiencies predominant in the context of *Christian Way Ministries* is just a small cog of the overall statement of problem as to why America resides in an age of moral relativism.

**Problem Presented**

In regard to how this research will approach the challenges confronting the church at the local level, this ministry thesis project will endeavor to provide tangible results of *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism* in the context of *Christian Way Ministries* in Virginia Beach and in Long Island, New York; a satellite location where one of the deacons from the church resides and conducts a weekly women’s Bible study. These efforts will hopefully equip believers as disciples for the Great Commission in their local communities that are so desperately needed and present an example to other local ministries to follow. Paul said in his letter to the Ephesian church, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” ⁶ Before disciples can make disciples, they must first be discipled by the church and understand the essential elements of the Gospel in order to inculcate its teaching in their local context. This understanding must include how Jesus and his disciples engaged their culture in the first century and use it as a model example for how disciples in the Western Church are to fulfill their part of the Great Commission. Additionally, believers must understand their own American history and how America became the secular nation it is today. Unfortunately, there are several problems the

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twenty-first century church is facing in America that has contributed to its overall decline in church growth and attendance within the past twenty years. Those problems at minimum include several deceptions exploited by Satan himself, the loopholes the constitution left opened to oppose the Christian faith, a redefinition of separation of church and state, the steady moral deterioration America is experiencing, believers being ill-equipped to engage the existing worldviews prevalent in the their local communities, a watered-down preaching of the Gospel that appeases the flesh, and the misconception that discipleship and the Great Commission are optional components of Christianity. For these reasons, it will be important for this project to concentrate on what it means to be an actual disciple of Jesus, to become aware of the spiritual battle that confronts the church, to learn the history regarding how the church in America arrived at its current relative state, and how to teach disciples to fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission within its existing culture. The primary problem this ministry project aims to address that is prevalent within the local context of Christian Way Ministries pertains to the lack of teaching intentional discipleship and a devoid from the church as a whole in the community to tackle the Great Commission head on; the only true cure to America’s moral relativism.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry (DMIN) on *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism* is largely due to the statement of problem primarily concerning the current decline in church growth, affiliation, and attendance in America within the past twenty years. As the prophet charged Israel during the time of the Assyrians in Hosea 4:6, “my people are destroyed from a lack of knowledge.” Likewise, the church in America is decreasing because of a lack of knowledge pertaining to the reasons why the church is losing membership, why many churches are closing its doors, and why America in general is morally declining. Knowing these reasons why the Western church is waning inspired the desire and passion to bring
awareness to the physical and spiritual symptoms plaguing the church in the twenty-first century, which will hopefully bring attention to these contemporary dilemmas and seek biblical solutions that will derail the train of secularism. Obviously, this is a monumental task to derail what appears like a runaway train of rebellion against God traveling in a direction of no return in America. However, all it takes is a flick of a match to set the whole forest of change ablaze!

There are many great resources that are available that speaks to the plight of the contemporary church and the moral state of America, and not only does this research project have a desire to add to the foundation of so many other informative studies, but it also wants to take it a step further and place a copy of this thesis project on the doorstep of every local church to spark the awareness needed to embrace collaborative efforts for discipleship and the Great Commission.

The Western Church desperately needs to be reminded of Satan’s objective to keep churches across the United States denominationally isolated, to keep them from understanding the knowledge of the current statistics demonstrating the regression of growth and attendance, to keep them from knowing the historical events that contributed to America’s moral demise, and to keep them from comprehending the enormity of teaching intentional discipleship; one of the fundamental principles of Christian orthodoxy. Christianity is not Christianity without discipleship! The ultimate purpose and aspiration of this action-based research is to expose the lies of the enemy, bring awareness to the statement of problem, and emphasize the dire need to teach intentional discipleship.

**Basic Assumptions**

Now, when it comes to the basic assumptions and presuppositions the writer possesses regarding the current state of the church, it was already assumed that the church was lacking in the department of intentional discipleship and zeal for evangelism. Before *Christian Way Ministries* was planted almost six years ago by the grace of God on August 9th, 2015, the writer
was able to personally witness a stoic demeanor and lack of enthusiasm towards the Great Commission. When the writer served as a Youth Pastor in a Pentecostal church for two years after returning from *Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course* for the United States Army in 2013 prior to planting the church, there was more of an emphasis on speaking in tongues and being baptized in the spirit than making disciples. Matter of fact, the writer cannot even recall anything really being mentioned about the Great Commission from the pulpit or the importance of evangelizing the local community. There was no emphasis on discipleship, nor any kind of program geared towards making disciples. One of the presuppositions formulated throughout the years of ministerial experience is that discipleship and the Great Commission was just an element of the Gospel that was an optional component to Christianity, especially in America. It also appeared that understanding the essential elements of the Gospel such as fulfilling the charge of the Great Commission as a disciple of Jesus are not high-level priorities of many churches across America. Hence, the statistical waning in church growth, attendance, and affiliation alludes to this notion. The postmodern church in America has become more about experience and emotion rather than the radical truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, it is also presumed that if the church as a whole would withdraw from their denominational bubble, set aside their secondary theological differences and worship expressions, and collaborate together starting at the local level for the sake of the Great Commission, the church would be effective in curving their own statistical decline along with America’s moral depravity, in particular; the inner city communities where an alarming rate of violence and homicide are on the rise across the United States. Indeed, this surge of societal recklessness in the local communities could be viewed as a positive opportunity for the church to evangelize its own communities. Just as Jesus said in the Gospel of John 4:35, “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for the harvest.” Similarly, with the decline of
Western culture, church growth, and religious affiliation in America along with the rise of other non-Christian groups, the harvest is ripe for the picking if the church becomes invested with prioritizing discipleship and the Great Commission. The church must never lose sight of the fact that every disciple made for the Lord Jesus Christ is one less disciple made for Satan. If the preaching of the Gospel from the pulpit of 400,000 churches in America were in unison of admonishing relative truth, emphasized radical transformation, incorporated intentional discipleship, and obligated the Great Commission as a mandatory component to the Christian faith instead of discretionary, America would less likely be growing more secular, but more spiritual and Christ-centered. These assumptions of how the church could counter the current spirit of Western Christianity in the twenty-first century in conjunction with the writer’s personal ministerial experience regarding the lack of intentional discipleship is ultimately the motivation behind executing this research. However, it is important to make mention that if one does not begin with the presupposition that Jesus Christ is the only absolute and perfect manifestation of moral righteousness to ever exist in bodily form and that His Gospel possesses the only convicting power to convert sinners to follow Him in discipleship, this project will be ineffective of defending the proposed thesis to those who do not believe these fundamental truths.

Definitions

Before this project delves into the specifics of *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism*, it is important to clarify certain terms that are going to be utilized throughout this research, which this section will do in alphabetical form.
Disciple. A disciple according to the Greek, “mathetes, is a learner or follower – usually someone committed to a significant master.” A disciple in the context of this research is one who learns and follows Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and is a “born-again” believer.

Discipleship. The term “discipleship,” although not mentioned in Scripture is the process of following Jesus. “The suffix ‘ship” is derived from the Old English ‘scipe,’ meaning ‘the state of, contained in, or condition. Discipleship is the state of being a disciple; we are always in the condition of being disciples – loving Christ and obeying our Master.”

Great Commission. The subheading, “The Great Commission” found in many Bibles is also not specifically mentioned in Scripture, but “is a divine mandate which is the profoundest law of the church's being, and Pentecost is the effectuation of that mandate. The Great Commission is the mandate to the church to witness and to witness universally. At Pentecost this mandate became an organic part of the church's being, an essential expression of her life.”

The Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is vitally important to define for the purposes of teaching intentional discipleship. According to the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, the gospel of Jesus Christ “is the joyous proclamation of God’s redemptive activity in Christ Jesus on behalf of humans enslaved by sin.” Additionally, “the gospel is the Story of

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9 Shirley, "It Takes A Church To Make A Disciple,” 211.


Israel that finds resolution in the saving Story of Jesus, and that story is about God’s work in this world in the people of God.”

Liberalism. Even though this term will be seldomly used throughout this research, it is important to define it since it is one of the contributing factors to the age of relativism. David Fiorazo defines liberalism as “a philosophy or movement toward humanism, science, and socialism and away from traditional religion; emphasis on freedom from authority and fundamentalism, esp. individual freedom; believing the goodness of human beings rather than acknowledging God.”

Moral Relativism. “The term ‘moral relativism’ is understood in a variety of ways. Most often it is associated with an empirical thesis that there are deep and widespread moral disagreements and a metaethical thesis that the truth or justification of moral judgments is not absolute, but relative to the moral standard of some person or group of persons. Sometimes ‘moral relativism’ is connected with a normative position about how we ought to think about or act towards those with whom we morally disagree, most commonly that we should tolerate them.” Since moral relativism is widespread and has expanded across the entire globe, this thesis will home in on the moral relativism that exists in America while mentioning some external factors in passing.

Postmodernism. A reaction to modernism, postmodernism is a complicated term to define “because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including

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Nevertheless, for the purposes of this theological treatise, postmodernism

“is a repudiating of universals, an abandonment of appeals to reason and a rejection of modernism’s claim. According to Stanley Grenz, this despair results from a failure to discover absolute truth outside oneself. Dennis McCallum says Postmodernism, as it applies to our everyday lives, is the death of truth as we know it. However, postmodernism, can be seen as a condition of relativity, with no rules to guide us in our quest for understanding reality and truth. As Gene Veith said, postmodernism... The intellect is replaced by the will. Reason is replaced by emotion. Morality is replaced by relativism. Reality itself becomes a social construct.”

Secularism. According to the Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, “secularism involves an affirmation of immanent, this worldly realities, along with a denial or exclusion of transcendent, other-worldly realities. It is a worldview and lifestyle oriented to the profane rather than the sacred, the natural rather than the supernatural. Secularism is a nonreligious approach to individual and social life.”

Social Constructionism. “Taking human social reality not as an objectively fixed, external fact, but rather as significantly constructed through processes of social interaction – which draw on culturally available cognitive categories and unevenly distributed resources.”

Subjectivism. “A theory that limits knowledge to subjective experience; a doctrine that the supreme good is the realization of a subjective experience or feeling; a doctrine that individual feeling or apprehension is the ultimate criterion of the good and the right.”

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Limitations

When it comes to testing the data for this particular project, there are going to be some obvious limitations, especially considering that a portion of this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic where the state of Virginia was practically locked down for approximately two months beginning in March of 2020. However, now that Virginia’s economy is operating at some level of normalcy, there still remains some limitations in accomplishing this project. Mainly, the members selected to participate in the applied research portion of this project may or may not be able to attend the full course because of the many uncertainties of life that can possibly hinder the successful completion of the eight-week course. One of those obstacles is the fear of contracting the virus, which is preventing many from attending church in general.

Another limitation that comes to mind pertains to the results of the study and whether teaching intentional discipleship will actually encourage members to fulfill their part of the Great Commission as the Lord wills, let alone inspire other local ministries to set aside their denominational differences and come together in effort to be intentional with discipleship in an age of moral relativism. There is just no way to measure the impact this research will have if any towards the long-term vision of halting and reversing the relativistic trends of Western culture. At a minimum, there is an expectation that this project will lead and encourage members at Christian Way Ministries to paddle against the tide of Western culture, to be more than just Christians mentally, to be disciples actionably, and to exercise their part of the Great Commission. Part of the applied research this project will incorporate includes an eight-week course on discipleship that will concentrate on the essential elements of the Gospel, the Great Commission, and the historical analysis on how America became increasingly secular throughout her history. There will be a pre- and post-questionnaire given at the commencement and the conclusion of this eight-week course to analyze the growth of the participants knowledge.
regarding the specific teachings that will be addressed and to evaluate how they will enact the Great Commission. Although the questionnaire will test the knowledge of the participants and even question their plan of action on how they will fulfill the Great Commission individually, there is no way to gauge in advance the impact this course will have beyond the completion of this project. Unfortunately, this study does not allow the participants enough time to actually go and fulfill the command of the Great Commission over an allotted period of time in order to annotate their results.

**Delimitations**

Outside of these limitations, a personal hinderance that may impede the progress of this project pertains to the amount of travel that will be required for it to be successful. The church in which this course will be conducted in Virginia Beach is an hour and a half away from Richmond, Virginia where the writer resided. There are other limitations that can occur at any given moment as a hospice chaplain responsible for providing end-of-life care, as a husband of one wife, and as a father of two young boys. Therefore, to avoid these limitations, it is incumbent upon this project to prepare ahead, to draft the pre- and post-questionnaires, to develop the content of the eight-week course in advance, to offer the content of the eight-week course online to give participants an opportunity to receive the instruction virtually if they are unable to attend physically, to identify which members of the congregation are going to volunteer in the project, and to schedule the time and location the research will be conducted. Another delimitation that will embolden participants to complete the study will include a certificate of completion at the conclusion of the eight-week course. Lastly, knowing the limitations and the delimitations of the ministry thesis project in advance will not only provide the researcher an opportunity to consider all possible obstacles and outcomes, but it will also afford this project the room to plan well in order to limit the number of uncontrollable variables.
Moreover, it is important to note that all of the research and preparations will be conducted to achieve three goals: to bring historical awareness of how America arrived to her current moral condition; to demonstrate how the influence of moral relativism subtly deceived many churches into accepting her adulterous ways; and to prove that the only way to truly stop the bleeding of America’s deep wound of sin (if the bleeding can be stopped) is for both the church and the people to repent of their backslidden customs and revert back to the fundamentals of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is essential for Christian Way Ministries to lead by example in regard to what this thesis is proposing. The age of moral relativism was years in the making and America is reaping the fruit of her immorality in the twenty-first century with no end in sight. Her only hope at this junction is Jesus! Her only hope is the radical Gospel! Her only hope is for the church to evangelize their own country! Her only hope is that the Spirit of God would convict the hearts of his people to fall on their knees in repentance, cry out for mercy, and wake up to the spiritual battle that Satan has been waging against this country since before its inception! That is her only hope! The only way to reverse the curse of moral relativism in America today is by bringing awareness to the steadily declining religious landscape of Western culture, by clarifying some of the common misconceptions surrounding Christianity, and by reemphasizing the fulfillment of the Great Commission that includes teaching intentional discipleship through the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ in order to make one disciple at a time transforming their hearts, and ultimately reciprocating the disciple-making process that will impact the context of the local church and possibly influence the entire nation. This is the aspiration of Christian Way Ministries to join the charge with other local ministries to derail moral relativism with the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. The aim of this research is not to invent a brand new philosophy or to introduce a new concept, but to regurgitate a gospel-
centered form of discipleship that contains practically the only power and opportunity to transform the heart and realign the purpose of the church towards the Great Commission as it was intended in the first-century New Testament church. As Malphurs and Penfold eloquently stated in their assessment into the waning of the American church, it was their desire to “re-envision” and to “revitalize” the established churches across the nation “to have any hope for the future of the church in America.”

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Part of the reason why this research considers *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism* in the United States of America mission-essential is basically due to the spiritual and eternal implications that await those who continue down this relative trajectory. In other words, eternity is on the line! The Gospel of Jesus Christ that includes the charge of the Great Commission is the primary resolution to cure America’s spiritual disease of apostasy that will ultimately save souls from perpetual condemnation and hell. This is exactly why the statement of problem regarding the current regression of church growth, attendance, and affiliation must be addressed in expectation to prevent the wound of moral relativism from bleeding out to one’s spiritual demise. Especially, when considering the recent events occurring in America in the year 2020 with the Coronavirus, the controversies surrounding the death of George Floyd and others, and the alarming uptick in violence across the nation where the reaction of the postmodern spirit is on full display with rioting, protesting, uncontrollable behavior and emotion that has become the new truth for many, and generated fear amongst many who do not accept their expression into submission. The contemporary state of the country may already be beyond spiritual repair due to the drastic measures implemented to reshape the nation.

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without God, which this project will explain further in the section pertaining to the historical formulations of how America arrived at its secular destination. Nevertheless, notice carefully what Paul said in Romans 1:24-25 regarding the consequences of forsaking the moral truth of God’s holy commands: “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.” Paul also said in 2 Thessalonians 2:10b-11, “They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.” This is exactly the plight of moral relativism in America today; a nation that has exchanged the truth of God for the lie of postmodernism. Sadly, many churches in America are conforming to the patterns of Western culture in the name of churching the unchurched. What Paul mentioned to the church approximately two thousand years ago is actually transpiring before our very eyes! There is nothing new under the sun! America’s spiritual adversary has been slowly waging war against the church within the past century. Consequently, many churches are on the verge of either collapsing, being closed down, vacated, abandoned, divided, and have lost sight of their true essence and mission. It is projected according to a study conducted by Malphurs and Penfold, which was based off the current trend of church statistics in 2014 that approximately 55,000 churches will close from the year 2005 through the year 2020.20 These projections along with the current state of many churches in America are the primary reasons why this research project is being executed. The intent of this thesis is to bring awareness to the current crisis the church is confronting in America and to regenerate the fundamentals of discipleship and the

Great Commission if the church in America has any hope in turning the tide of moral relativism, which this project believes there is still a chance through the grace of Jesus Christ.

**Literature Review**

In regard to the literature utilized in this research on *Teaching Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism*, there are many academic sources and biblical references this project can extrapolate from that will correlate to the exploration of discipleship and moral relativism. However, in this particular section, the literature review will concentrate on those specific sources and verses of Scripture that will gain the most engagement concerning discipleship, the current state of the church in America, the destructive effect of moral relativism in the church, and the historical formulations of how America arrived at her current destination. First, the review of literature will begin with the sources pertaining to the statement of problem plaguing the growth of the church in America. Then it will review the sources concerning the effects of moral relativism in the church and review certain passages of Scripture that speak on relativism. Lastly, the review of literature will discuss sources along with Scripture on discipleship and the necessity of fulfilling the Great Commission as a means to counteract the age of moral relativism in America. It is also important to note that many of these sources will intersect with the research regarding the current state of the church, moral relativism, discipleship, and the Great Commission.

**The Contemporary State of the Western Church**

The first source this project already cited above regarding the current state of the church is *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* by Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, which was written in 2014 and contains startling results. For instance, it states, “Today, of the approximately 350,000 churches in America, four out of five are either plateaued or
declining.” \(^{21}\) Just this statistic alone affirms some of the on-going research demonstrating a problematic trend within the Western Church. Their research sounds the alarm that unless the church understands the current statistical climate and shift that is occurring, the estimates will only assumingly get worse. In addition, the research included in this particular source compares the current decline in church growth and attendance to the increase in non-Christian groups and cults. \(^{22}\) So, while the church is declining in America, other religions, cults, and movements are catching steam, and many churches are unaware of this study. In order for the church to effectively counteract this statistical quandary, this research is proposing that they come to the realization that a problem exists. The church overall must first accept the legitimacy of the research done by many credible sources and scrupulously survey their own spiritual and theological health by measuring it to Scripture and these various studies. If just a few of the churches in America who have fallen for the relative deception of Satan are awaken to the current research, this awareness will provide them an opportunity to reexamine, repent, and realign herself back to the Word of God. Being considerate of how America reached its current destination of moral relativism will at minimum convict the heart of the churches to reevaluate their theology and formalities against the actual missional mandate of Jesus Christ according to Matthew 28:18-20.

Moreover, there are additional sources that will be utilized to confirm the statement of problem regarding the spiritual dilemmas afflicting the Western Church to include *Gnostic America: A Reading of Contemporary American Culture & Religion according to Christianity’s Oldest Heresy* by Peter M. Burfeind, which speaks about the underlying root of how America


\[^{22}\text{Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 23-24.}\]
arrived at its current moral relative condition. It blames Gnosticism as the essence to nihilism, progressivism, Hollywood’s elitism class, mass media, millenarianism, and ultimately the religious waning in the Western Church. It cites a 2012 WIN-Gallup International report which states, “in the previous seven years, the number of people describing themselves as religious fell from 73 percent to 60 percent.” In other words, in 2012 there was a thirteen percent drop from the year 2005, which has since decreased to twenty percent according to the Gallup poll previously conducted in 2019. In a report written by Alvin Reid in 2002 almost twenty years ago, he was on to something when he addressed the alarming digression of practicing Christians in America only a couple of years after the millennium. It stated that the radically unchurch consisted of 116.85 million or 41 percent of Americans who report no religious affiliation while only 82.08 million or 29 percent consider themselves practicing Christians. In the year 2002, it was reported then that less than thirty percent of the overall population in America was practicing Christians, which is unbelievably disheartening and proof that the church in America has been significantly dwindling within the past twenty years, and if the church does not take these disturbing statistics into heavy consideration, the number of practicing Christians could drop by more than half in the next twenty years.

Lastly, in regard to the contemporary state of the church and the major challenges it is facing in America, the church is obviously under spiritual attack considering the statistics, which unfortunately was decades in the making. In Taylor Marshall’s book, Infiltration: The Plot To Destroy The Church From Within, the ultimate problem the church is facing today is Satan

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himself. Taylor traces the historical formulations of the Catholic church during the time of the reformation period and how the strategies of Satan through movements such as Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, which are other forms of Gnosticism attempted to subvert the church and its Gospel message. The same strategies Satan used to deceive Adam and Eve in the beginning of creation can be traced throughout the history of Scripture and the church. In particular, the period of the Enlightenment is one of the major influences Satan utilized to transfer and transform the spiritual shape of America from being a predominantly Christian nation to a predominantly secular nation. The research conducted by Chris Smith, *The Secular Revolution* written in 2003 goes into great detail with how the spirit of the Enlightenment secularized American public life and how academia became one of the major culprits exploited to transform the land of the free. From 1870 through 1930, “the number of Americans who were being exposed to Europe’s secular Enlightenment ideology through higher education and going into knowledge-elite professions was reaching critical mass and forming into self-conscious communities. It was from among a new critical mass of these elites that movements emerged seeking to marginalize the cultural authority of the Protestant establishment and secularize America’s public institutions,” which is exactly what occurred and now even worse almost twenty years later. America went from a nation founded on biblical principles and faith in Jesus Christ to a free-thinking nation morphed on self-preservation, pluralism, media indoctrination, complete separation of church and state, and liberal churches with little to no emphasis on discipleship. Satan cunningly advanced on the weaknesses of America at its founding, in particular, the less evolved university

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in the late nineteenth century that forced students to travel to Europe to attain a higher education that allowed the spirit of Enlightenment thinking to reallocate back to America under the guise of “the natural and inevitable by-product of modernization.”

It is important to note that moral relativism is not the cause for the reshaping of America or the decline of the church, but the result of several symptoms that have contributed to her regression. Tragically, when examining the contemporary state of the church, Satan’s conniving attacks against the church are in the opinion of this thesis one of the primary causes that has affected her overall growth, and is no different from how Satan attempted to infiltrate and prevent the church of Jesus Christ from being established in the first century. In the Gospel of Matthew 16:21-23 immediately following Peter’s proclamation in the context, notice how Satan is on the lurk bidding to distract Jesus from accomplishing the will of the Father right after Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom. Satan attempts, unsuccessfully, to use Peter as a distraction to prevent the Lord from redeeming his people through his own death. Jesus turned and said to Peter in Matthew 16:23, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” As soon as Jesus decreed that He would build His church in the context, Satan was on the pursuit to inhibit the Will of God just as he did in the beginning of creation. Fortunately, Jesus was able to recognize the devil’s scheme instantaneously and did not allow him to avert the establishment of the church, but not so much with Western Christianity today. Throughout the past two centuries, especially within the past two decades, the church has unknowingly permitted Satan to camouflage his opposition in such a way that has resulted in a twenty percent decline in church membership and religious affiliation plunging America further into the age of moral relativism. Just as Satan was a

stumbling block to the ministry of Jesus Christ in the first century, Satan is presently a stumbling block to the church in the twenty-first century and is one of the primary reasons why the church is experiencing a major decline in growth and attendance. In fact, Paul makes clear in 2 Corinthians 4:4, which coincides with America’s spiritual darkness that “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” This passage of Scripture will not only tie in perfectly with the statement of problem facing the Western Church and the local ministry in Virginia Beach, but also coincides well with Marshall’s book, Infiltration, and how Satan is the throne in the American church.

What is Moral Relativism?

Although Satan shares much of the responsibility to America’s spiritual degradation, there are many other dynamics that have contributed to the statistical decline of the church along with the moral decline of America to include sin, a lack of personal responsibility, the breakdown of the nuclear family, hypocritical leadership in the church, a diluted preaching of the Gospel, and the appointment of certain government officials throughout history who do not fear the Lord and passed unrighteous legislation. However, before this research project turns its attention to the historical formulations of moral relativism in America and pursue resolutions, first, a neutral autopsy needs to be performed on the term, “moral relativism.” According to David Fiorazo in his book, The Cost of our Silence, “In order to cure a disease, a good doctor will first diagnose the problem, identify what it is, what caused it, and then tell the patient what needs to be done. This includes an explanation of how to treat the disease.”28 Likewise, to be effective with teaching intentional discipleship in an age of moral relativism, there needs to be a

thorough diagnosis of the problem confronting the church in America before any solutions can be considered and implemented. Only a thorough analysis into the matter of America’s moral deterioration can equip the people of God with the necessary knowledge to be more intentional with the Great Commission. Now, there are many terms that can often be associated and even used synonymously with moral relativism to include postmodernism, secularism, progressivism, liberalism, social constructionism, and even atheism or exclusive humanism, which all have been defined in chapter one. Unfortunately, this project will not be able to handle all of the intricacies and nuances associated with moral relativism, but it will concentrate specifically with how it relates to secularism, with how it is at war against Christianity, and how it infiltrated the church in America. Hence, when it comes to describing and diagnosing the symptoms of moral relativism, it will do so as it pertains to the liberal and anti-Christian attempts to eliminate any form of Christian expression and freedom from American society while pressuring the church to accept America’s ever evolving secular culture.

The first source this research will engage regarding the meaning of moral relativism is *Redefining Truth* by David Fiorazo, which relates to the statement of problem concerning America’s rapid and moral digression. In chapter seven, Fiorazo cites a study conducted by *Barna Research* in 2016 that “only 35 percent of people believe moral truth is absolute,” and concluded that “Christian morality is being ushered out of American social structures and off the cultural mainstage.” The common perception of moral relativism in America today is an anti-religious one that elevates subjectivism over absolutism while deliberately eradicating any connotation of Christianity and affording other worldviews the opportunity to flourish. The difference between moral absolutism and moral relativism according to Fiorazo is that “moral

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absolutism emerges from a theistic worldview, whereas moral relativism is based on an atheistic worldview and holds the idea that conflicting beliefs can be true. (What is moral for me may be immoral for you, etc.)”30 In other words, moral relativism’s objective is to mold a godless and subjective society “to which Americans pledge allegiance to the morality of self-fulfillment, a new moral code that has all but replaced Christianity as the culture’s moral norm.”31 Their aim is to influence a culture built on opinion, feelings, and acceptance of all various beliefs except the objective and absolute truth promulgated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which the United States was fundamentally established on. Hence, the target of this research is not to advocate for a resurgence of theism in general since there exists other non-Christian groups in America who believe their god or gods possess the absolute truth. Instead, it is proposing the monotheism declared by Jesus Christ according to the Gospels as the only objective and powerful worldview to counter the age of moral relativism. In John 14:6, Jesus made a very exclusive claim when he said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father in heaven except through me.” Correspondingly, this research is taking a similar approach in defending the exclusive claim that teaching intentional discipleship through the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Great Commission as the only spiritual and moral solution to America’s corruption and the decline of the Western church.

Moreover, while figures such as Fiorazo deem moral relativism an affront to theism, moral relativism according to the Encyclopedia Britannica is also known as “ethical relativism,” which defines it as “the doctrine that there are no absolute truths in ethics and that what is morally right or wrong varies from person to person or from society to society; right and wrong

30 Fiorazo, Redefining Truth, 91-92.

31 Ibid., 90.
are relative to individual preferences rather than social standards.” In other words, truth and morality are subjective to the individual. Meaning, the individual person, not God nor his commands define what is moral or immoral, right or wrong, true or false, especially in a country where the constitution stopped short of establishing Christianity as the absolute truth and allowed the individualistic spirit of the Enlightenment that left the door opened for contrary moral beliefs to be heard and made law. The church in America is no longer the epicenter of morality and truth as it once was at America’s founding, but truth is now in the hands of the individual citizen who decides what is moral and immoral. Truth is now in the eyes of the beholder! America went from being a nation built on the absolute authority of God’s Word with the church as the spokesperson to communicate this objective morality to a nation where the individual citizens define their own truth and become their own authority. In James Smith rendering of Charles Taylor’s research, he describes the age of moral relativism in America as the “nova effect” where “an explosion of options for finding (or creating) significance” exists in our culture to include the option of contesting those traditional beliefs once commonly held as objective truth. The subjectivity of moral relativism is not contingent on any external authority such as the Bible or the greatest ethical and righteous person to ever dawn the human flesh, Jesus Christ. Subjectivism is simply based on an internal emotion, based on one’s individual rationality and reality about whatever moral truth is up for discussion, or based off an external influence or source that persuaded a derivation from conventional truth; creating a plurality of different views that are contrary to absolutism. Additionally, what makes defining moral relativism so complicated according to

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James K. Smith in *Who’s Afraid of Relativism* is not only its wide spectrum of academic disciplines relativism can span across, but also because it lacks “a unified school or relativist thought.” Nevertheless, despite the ambiguity that exists, moral relativism is generally known as “the antithesis of the absolute truth we proclaim in the Gospel.” James Smith cites J.P. Moreland’s perspective on moral relativism as “treason against God and his word.” The consensus regarding moral relativism across the continuum is generally associated with an irreligious undertone, which is apparent from the above references that theists consider moral relativism an enemy to the supernatural and to religion in general, but particularly hostile to Christianity.

However, despite the negative connotation associated with moral relativism, James Smith is able to postulate (to an extent) a reasonable explanation on why it exists. Even though he acknowledges up front the common irreligious conceptions regarding moral relativism in his book, he believes there is something to be learned from an ontological perspective, which pertains to the nature of human existence and creaturehood. Understanding the ontological point of view regarding the moral relative position can lead towards generating effective solutions that will assist with teaching intentional discipleship in a secular culture. It can also provide clarity into the reason why moral relativism exists and why so many Christians are opposed to it. Smith is very specific in addressing aspects of moral relativism that he believes is underrepresented. He states, “This Christian reaction to relativism, with its therapeutic deployment of absolute truth, is a symptom of a deeper theological problem: an inability to honor the contingency and


35 Ibid., 16.

36 Ibid.
dependence of our creaturehood.”

Essentially, Smith agrees that all people are in a sense relativists. The prophet Isaiah describes humanity in general “like grass and their faithfulness like the flowers of the field,” which ultimately wither and fall. Smith asserts that all people are relativists based on their creaturehood and based on their contingency to obtain whatever truth or knowledge outside of themselves. Even Froese and Bader agree in their book, *America’s Four Gods* that all Americans are essentially moral relativists simply because Americans portray morality in contradictory ways. For instance, while many Christians consider the legalization of abortion immoral, there are those on the other side of the spectrum who believe abortion is a moral progression for women’s reproductive rights. This same moral reversal applies to other controversial matters to include homosexuality, transgenderism, gender identity, euthanasia, capital punishment, etc. The existence of moral relativism in America stems from the obvious fact that its citizens are afforded the constitutional right to decide for themselves what is moral or what is immoral. Furthermore, Americans also have the choice to change their moral stance on a particular issue depending on the extenuating circumstances, thus making them moral relativists. In particular, a moral relativist may be a pro-life advocate, but may support abortion in the case of rape, incest, or in the defense of women’s reproductive rights, which is contrary to the moral absolutism position that would deem abortion immoral regardless of the circumstances. This changing nature of morality that has slowly evolved throughout the centuries is one of the reasons why the age of relativism exists in the twenty-first century and one of the reasons why many Christians are opposed to it.

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38 Isaiah 40:6.

On the other hand, James Smith is calculated with emphasizing the ontological angle of humanity being created in the image of God who are dependent on Him as the external source of wisdom and morality; a creation contingent upon the Creator. He asserts, “True knowledge depends on God’s revelation, and receiving that revelation depends on the regenerating and illuminating power of the Spirit as the conditions for knowing, which requires being enfolded into that people who gather in worship, to hear the Word, illumined by the Spirit.”40 From this perspective, Smith is able to shed light on the other dimension of moral relativism that is often understated. He is diligent to remind his readers that Christians are also relativists in the general sense of the term because of their ontology and radical dependence on God, the Holy Spirit, and the Scriptures as their external source of morality. This external moral code that Christians are dependent on is where they derive their moral absolutes. So, before Christians go accusing the irreligious of being moral relativists, they must understand that they can also be moral relativists due to their dependence on God as their external source of wisdom and due to the fact that many Christians can and have changed their attitude on certain moral issues. Consequently, the problem the church is facing today in America and the reason why moral relativism is frowned upon is not necessarily because people are moral relativists ontologically. It is because the moral foundation that America was established on is eroding away due to a lack of teaching intentional discipleship along with the church remaining silent or reversing course on several of these moral issues. Although the constitution left the window open for the emergence of moral relativism to seep in, America went from a people strictly dependent on God, the Holy Spirit, and Scripture, into a people that are loosely dependent on God and more dependent on themselves as the arbitrator of morality.

Surprisingly, not only are many Christians turning the other cheek on America’s ever-increasing secular culture, but the church is also part of the blame why the morals of America are being depleted. Smith exclaims that “North American Christianity is especially allergic to the relativism and contingency highlighted by pragmatism precisely because we have become a people who are bent on security, comfort, and autonomy. We are uncomfortable with the scandalous dependence of radical discipleship.” In a self-centered culture grounded in autonomy, the church has gradually conformed to the ways of secular society without many of them even knowing it and have grown to become just as independent as secular society. The church went from teaching a Gospel that is radically dependent on God to a Gospel focused on individualism and satisfying the empirical itch. While the age of moral relativism is drifting further away from the supernatural, the church is also drifting away from their dependence on God, drifting away from teaching intentional discipleship, and drifting away from their first love of biblical orthodoxy. Just consider for example the multitude of mainline denominations in America today who are facing doctrinal schisms within their own circles because of the controversial matters mentioned above and are capitulating to the secular agenda. In the book, *What is a Person* by Christian Smith, it is important to remember that “Humans possess the capacity and propensity not only to have desires, beliefs, and feelings, but also the capacity and disposition to make moral evaluations of our desires, beliefs, and feelings, which opens the potential to change them,” making humanity a relativist creation by its own nature. This window of opportunity to change how one believes regarding those moral controversies is inherent in the personhood of the creature, and provides the answer to why moral relativism

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exists. Human beings are liable at any given moment to change their moral positions based on
their ever-changing culture, which is exactly what James Smith is attempting to magnify in order
to raise awareness to the root of moral relativism and challenge it effectively.

Moral Relativism in Scripture

More importantly, this moral disorder America is currently experiencing is not the first
time this has occurred in human history, but strikingly consistent with the moral relativism in
Scripture, which this section will briefly review. During the period of the Judges in Israel before
the monarchy, the Scriptures are very transparent that “everyone did what was right in his own
eyes.”43 Israel’s immorality was threefold: they turned away from the law of God, they followed
after the ways of their pagan neighbors, and they did what was right in their own eyes instead of
doing what was right according to the law of God. Israel deserted the living God and His
commands and replaced Him with the gods and cultural ways of their foreign neighbors. This
reversal is the epitome of what moral relativism is all about in the western world today; everyone
doing what is right in their own eyes while substituting Christian moral values with more self-
glorifying humanistic ones developed from the Enlightenment. The Christian moral beliefs and
values that were once the embodiment of the United States are now consigned to subjectivism.
Once certain people (the minority) realized the fullness of their constitutional rights to challenge
the Christian moral standards of their day, which in this case, Christianity in America, they
began to seek ways to implement an anti-Christian ideology that has consequently resulted in the
removal of Christian morality, practices, and symbols from the public square. This moral
relativism which was disguised as progressivism in the twenty-first century to deceive the
masses into thinking that America was evolving as a culture was actually fostered to destabilize

43 Judges 21:25.
the country and the church from her true Christian identity. Peter Burfeind confirms this in his research when he associates progressivism as the mask of Christianity’s oldest heresy in Gnosticism and describes it as “a project by nineteenth century Pietists, revivalists, and enthusiasts to bring about the kingdom of God, who were passionately motivated to spread their individualistic spirituality into the New World” instead of focusing on the mandate of the Great Commission, preaching the unadulterated Gospel, and teaching intentional discipleship. This nineteenth century project led by members within the church has now plunged America into a full-throttled progressive nation that is almost reminiscent of Israel’s multiple epochs of moral relativism and arguably even worse.

The prophet Isaiah described this same moral condition when he rebuked the nation of Israel for their moral misbehavior when he said, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” Right before God sent the nation of Assyria to bring judgment upon Israel, the prophet Isaiah warned Israel numerous times of what would happen if they didn’t repent from their several immoralities. Isaiah’s description of Israel’s moral relativism is similar with the message of America’s secular culture that is constantly glorifying individualism with slogans such as “do you,” “live your own truth,” “believe what you want to believe,” “follow your own heart,” or “do what your heart desires.” These are some of the destructive phrases circulating western culture that have misled countless number of people away from the message of the Gospel. As mentioned previously, moral relativism is not based on any objective morality or any authoritative external truth, but dependent on one’s interpretative sentiment of truth and moral

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values. It is practically subjective and reliant on personal feelings instead of being contingent upon the moral truth of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. Nevertheless, one thing is for certain and evident throughout Scripture, whenever the people of God have turned away from his moral commands, it always resulted in their moral failure and demise. For instance, when Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., the Lord told Israel in Ezekiel 11:12, “And you will know that I am the Lord, for you have not followed my decrees or kept my laws but have conformed to the standards of the nations around you.” Additionally, when King Nebuchadnezzar turned his back on the Lord’s command and didn’t honor the God of heaven for the vastness of his kingdom, the Lord said in Jeremiah 25:12, “But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt, declares the Lord, and will make it desolate forever.” Likewise, the fall of Assyria, Persia, Greece, Rome, and now Europe and America are falling into the same ditch of moral relativism; forsaking the Lord and plunging them into the depth of unrighteousness. Only an about-face to the Word of God, the Great Commission, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and intentional discipleship that includes an emphasis on self-denial, repentance, and the righteousness of God will turn the tide of moral relativism!

**Historical Formulations of Moral Relativism in America**

Another very significant element this ministry research project must bring to the forefront in addition to the spiritual battle that will assist in neutralizing the plummeting statistics of the contemporary church is understanding the historical formulations of how the church arrived at its current condition. For instance, in David Horowitz’s book, *Dark Agenda*, he not only alludes to the spiritual battle of Satan and original sin, but he also substantiates this spiritual war against America and the church by revisiting those historical formulations that led to the contemporary state of the Western Church. The spiritual condition of America at its founding in 1776 was 99.9
percent Christian; 98 percent Protestant, 1.9 percent Catholic, and the remaining 0.1 percent was Jewish.\footnote{David Horowitz, \textit{Dark Agenda: The War to Destroy Christian America}, West Palm Beach, FL: Humanix Books, 2018, 40.} Fast-forward to the year 2020, 43 percent of adults identify with Protestantism, 20 percent Catholic, while 9 percent describe themselves as atheist or agnostic, and 17 percent describe themselves as no religious affiliation.\footnote{“In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” \textit{Pew Research Center's Religion \\& Public Life Project}, June 9, 2020, \url{www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/}, (August 1, 2020).} Once Horowitz illuminates the state of America at its founding in 1776, then he takes his readers on a historical journey he labels, the \textit{“Dark Agenda”} to describe how America went from being a Christian nation to a pluralistic and morally corrupt nation. America is rapidly changing its atmosphere and culture from “its ideological allegiance from Jefferson to Marx,” and Horowitz traces that historical formulation beginning with the spirit of the French Revolutionary War, through the Pelagian heresy that essentially became the doctrine of the progressive movement, through the legal precedents that practically expelled Christian expression from the public square, all the way through the political civil war that is attempting to vanquish the republic.\footnote{Horowitz, \textit{Dark Agenda}, 156-157.}

There are a multitude of references this ministry project can use to outline the historical formulations of the Western Church to include Nancy Koester, \textit{The History of Christianity in the United States}. In her book, she lends insight into the character of America before 1776 as such: “Before the Revolution, Americans feared that an Anglican bishop would be sent to the colonies, strengthening the Church of England here and tightening British control. The slogan ‘No Bishop, no king!’ rejected any alliance of monarchy and episcopacy.”\footnote{Nancy Koester, \textit{The History of Christianity in the United States}, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2007, 41.} In fact, the Declaration of
Independence outlines twenty-seven specific charges against the King of Great Britain and declares, “The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states.”

Meaning, in order to avoid the British monarchy from establishing itself in the New World, not only was the American Revolutionary war necessary, but its founding documents would inhibit governmental intrusion from ecclesiastical affairs, prevent an absolute tyranny, and afford Christianity the emancipation necessary to expand its moral influence and truth. Koester also states, “According to historian Gordon Wood, after the Revolution dissolved old bonds of monarchy, gentry, and church hierarchy, something else would have to hold society together. That ‘something else’ was benevolence or public virtue, inspiring citizens to put public good ahead of private power and gain. At the close of the eighteenth century, religion was thought to instill this virtue of benevolence, so necessary for the health of the new nation.”

That “something else” that would ultimately replace the British Monarchy in the New World would be the Declaration of Independence along with the Constitution of the United States that methodically implemented the Establishment Clause along with the Free Exercise Clause in the First Amendment preventing governmental meddling and affording Christianity the opportunity to flourish in a manner that would influence the spiritual and moral growth of a healthy nation founded on Christian ideals, liberty, and expression. Hence, the foundation of America as a republic required Christianity as its premiere building block compatible with other faiths to include the Catholics and the Jews who were representative of a very small fragment of the

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51 Koester, The History of Christianity in the United States, 46.
population during that time, unlike the pluralism that exists in America today that is constantly attempting to replace its first love. The founding fathers believed Christianity to be the necessary component to a healthy and moral nation. There was no such thing as “separation of church and state” during America’s inauguration as it is known today. Faith and government were practically inseparable! The only difference from the British monarchy and the republic is that the constitution vowed to abstain from governing the church.

However, the contemporary state of Christianity in America is night and day from its inception where faith, Jesus, and Scripture have been banished from practically all governmental public-led institutions. The next piece of literature this project will introduce, The Cost of Our Silence by David Fiorazo will trace the historical formulations that began to reform Christian America and separate the church from the state. For instance, one of the ways secularists attempted to restructure America was through the United States Supreme Court with a series of unprecedented legal rulings that bypassed the will of the people. Activists from the Freedom From Religion Foundation, American Civil Liberties Union, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and other antireligious organizations “achieved preferred rulings by feeding their cases to power-hungry courts; a runaway judicial branch has set the stage for an executive branch dictatorship in a country where this was never supposed to be possible.” The major rulings that would begin to turn the tide of America’s Christian moral foundation occurred by unelected Supreme Court judges who have become “the ultimate power, arbiter, or authority,” and who have the final say whether something is constitutional or not. For instance, the case of

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52 Fiorazo, The Cost of our Silence, 83.
53 Ibid., 83.
54 Ibid., 86.
*Everson v. The Board of Education* in 1947 is the first legal precedent that detonated a trend of subsequent legal decrees that would invoke separation of church and state and challenge any religious expression or practices in America’s most valuable institutions. The influence of secularism, the enlightenment, and the spirit to oppose Christianity began within the educational system. The ruling of *Everson v. The Board of Education*, which had nothing to do with the content of public-school instruction, would be the hallmark case that would not only restructure America’s educational system, but transform America’s landscape from religious to secular.

Subsequently, in the 1960’s, America witnessed the air of morality seeping out of its culture with several landmark cases such as *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), and *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) that eliminated public school prayer, voluntary Bible reading, and repealed a state law against contraceptives.55 According to Fiorazo, “The first few years in the 1960’s would prove both pivotal and detrimental to the church, culture, and family values in American society.”56 The 1960’s also proved to be decisive because of what would ensue next; the monumental case of *Wade v Roe* in 1973 which legalized abortion and saw more than sixty million babies aborted since the ruling. The legalization of abortion shattered families, caused many divisions within the church, created political factions, and increasingly demoted America’s morality. Although *Wade v Roe* was a new moral low for America during that time, it did not stop there. In the case of *Stone v. Graham* (1980) and *Glassroth v. Moore* (2002) saw the removal of the Ten Commandments from both the public schools and from state governmental grounds. By the twenty-first century, the anti-Christian fanatics who represent the minority were now successful in removing practically all hints of the

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56 Ibid., 80.
Judeo-Christian God from the public square through the back door of the Supreme Court, not the legislative process, the will of the people. Once the courts stripped the decalogue, prayer, and Scripture reading out of America’s most precious institutions and from the ability to dictate what is good and ethical behavior, the age of moral relativism is not only in full affect, but energized to extinguish any other clause, precedent, or law that is Christian or conservative in nature. For example, one of those long-standing traditions that secularists sought to reverse was the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) established under the Clinton administration in 1996, but unofficially recognized since the beginning of American history. The controversial case of Obergefell v. Hodges (2015) under the Obama administration would upend centuries worth of conventional wisdom regarding the definition of marriage between a male and a female. Unfortunately, legalizing homosexual marriage was the subsequent ruling that produced yet another shocking moral reversal certifying the label of America in the twenty-first century as a secular nation. This is not to include all the transgender issues, both sexes sharing the same bathrooms, men competing in women’s sports, and children having the opportunity to select their own gender despite their physiology. What was once a culture saturated in its Christian roots is now witnessing the fruit of moral relativism with no end in sight. What the founding fathers built, a democracy entrenched in Christian principles and morality is now crumbling and on the verge of moral catastrophe.

**Teaching Intentional Discipleship**

Reluctantly, there is still hope of curing America’s progressing moral disorder by simply repenting from her sin and by turning to the Lord with the church as the primary instrument to exhort revivalism and become the vessel of absolute truth God called the church to be. Just as it was imperative for the nation of Israel to turn from their many iniquities in 2 Chronicles 7:14 in order for God to heal their land, likewise, the same can still apply with America today. “If my
people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Only if the church at large in America would be intentional with teaching discipleship, the Great Commission, burst their denominational bubbles to join with other ministries in unity for the common cause of the Great Commission, proclaim the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ, and be a voice in the wilderness against the wave of moral and cultural relativism, only then could America be healed from her sinful ways. One of the primary consequences of America’s moral relativism stems from the fact that many churches were unintentional with teaching discipleship. In other words, the lack of urgency to make disciples for Christ while failing to resist the spirit of individualism that influenced the nation for the worse is essentially one of the many byproducts of moral relativism. In this next section, there are two books this project will combine into the research concerning intentional discipleship. The first one, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* by Greg Ogden will provide an overall outline on the fundamentals of what it means to be a disciple of Christ by utilizing a guide with four points in each chapter; Core Truth, Memory Verse, Inductive Bible Study, and Reading. With the many mischaracterizations of the Christian faith that exist in the Western world today, there are several key components to becoming a disciple of Christ that needs to be addressed and understood before a disciple can fulfill their part of the Great Commission. Understanding the essentials of discipleship is by far the key component in transforming one life at a time that will ultimately lead to the transformation of other lives for Christ. According to Ogden, “*Discipleship Essentials* is specifically designed to implement small, reproducible discipleship units.” Reciprocity of discipleship is the salvific missional

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objective of the Great Commission, which is why teaching intentional discipleship is vital in an age of moral relativism because every disciple made for Christ is one less disciple made for the world, for the culture, for Satan, and for hell.

Another great source that will contribute mightily to this particular section is *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* by Dallas Willard, which will clarify those misconceptions surrounding discipleship and the Great Commission. Even though this book was written in 2006, Willard asserts that “the governing assumption today, among professing Christians, is that we can be Christians forever and never become disciples.”

This assumption of optional discipleship along with a host of other worldly messages that have deceived many Christians into nominal adherence are contributing to the forward progress of America’s moral relativism. There are many believers who claim to be Christian by name but uncommitted to discipleship. As a result, the lack of disciple-making is producing lukewarm Christians across the nation that is breeding an individualistic spiritual culture silent on moral controversies and failing to reciprocate true converts for Jesus Christ. Hence, it is this facade of optional Christianity that Willard opposes to demonstrate the urgency of teaching intentional discipleship in order to counter the age of moral relativism. Being cognizant of this western version of Christianity also known as the “American Gospel” will bring awareness to its shortcomings, convict the hearts of those who have fallen short of becoming true disciples of Christ, and inspire churches across the nation to return back to the fundamentals of the Great Commission who will stand firm against a culture that is intentionally waging war against the Christian faith.

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Moreover, when it comes to the indispensable commission of teaching intentional discipleship, this project would be remiss without mentioning the notable perspective of Dietrich Bonhoeffer on *The Cost of Discipleship*. Although much of his writings are dated before the mid-twentieth century, his interpretation on discipleship, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and the church still resonates with many believers today. As Bonhoeffer realized during his imprisonment and torment under Hitler’s Nazism, “nothing less than a return to the Christian faith could save Germany.” Similarly, this research project also proposes that only a retreat from the age of moral relativism back to the living Word of God could save America from her potential moral demise.\(^5^9\) Nothing less than a complete surrender to the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures, teaching intentional discipleship, and exercising the Great Commission could save America from the darkest recess of moral relativism. Additionally, in the memoir written by G. Leibholz states, “Beyond that we know that the time will come when we shall have to realize that we owe it to the inspiration of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s life and death, and of those who died with him, that Western civilization can be saved. For not only in its material standards, but also in its spiritual vitality, has Western civilization been failing steadily and with increasing rapidity into ruin and destruction.”\(^6^0\) Notice that this memoir on Dietrich Bonhoeffer was written in Europe after the conclusion of World War II when America was dealing with its own issues of segregation, overcoming the Great Depression, along with landmark case of *Everson v. The Board of Education* that catapulted a multitude of Supreme Court cases erecting the wall of separation of church and state into jurisprudence, which drove America further into moral unrighteousness. If Leibholz’s interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s sentiment that only a return back to the Christian faith could save a nation from moral ruin was true then, how much more now that America has


\(^{6^0}\) Ibid., 34.
practically exterminated Jesus Christ out of the public square? Just consider the immoral fruit America is currently procuring after exiling God and his moral law to include an increase in mass shootings, public school indoctrination, the appalling statistics on abortion, the broad range of sexual depravity, the many violent protests across the country, the partisan civil war, the idolatrous devotion to entertainment, the practice of euthanasia etc., along with the expansion of liberal and progressive doctrine that is drastically reshaping the nation. Consequently, America has not improved morally over the years since removing God out of the equation in the 1960’s but has steadily declined over the past sixty years. Hence, the manifestation of decades worth of academic indoctrination that has fictitiously erected a steel wall of separation of church and state has now raised a whole generation of young minds that are taking the secular bull by the horns who are emoting themselves in a more aggressive tone that is unprecedented, dangerous, and uncontrollable. How else can the United States be saved from Satan’s overall attempt to destroy the land of the beautiful unless America returns back to the hands of the Lord? Leibholz believed in his memoir that there was hope in saving America then, not by an entirely new means, but by inculcating the timeless solution of discipleship written through the Great Commission. At this stage of America’s current state of moral relativism with all of its social justice failures to reform America minus God, the only hope and solution left is to return back to the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**The Great Commission Essentials**

This is why the Great Commission of Jesus Christ is not only crucial to fulfill, but it is the fundamental solution that is more than capable to cure a nation from its own moral demise. According to Matthew 28:19 Jesus said, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Now, there is so much to unpack in this
particular verse, however, the Great Commission of Jesus Christ boldly directs His disciples to
go to all nations, to all ethnos, and to all people regardless of their political, economic, or
sociological climate and make disciples. Although, this particular thesis is focused on the moral
relativism that exists in America, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Great Commission is a
global directive, to go to all nations. In fact, the reach of the Great Commission stretches far
beyond the territory of America and there are a multitude of reports that suggest that while the
church may be declining in America, the church is rapidly growing in other parts around the
world still making Christianity the largest religion. With that being said, Jesus understood the
sinful condition of mankind and knew that the only solution to transform the heart of his people
was through the revelatory implications regarding his true identity, his relationship with the
Father in heaven, his expectation for his followers to receive salvation, and by issuing a global
command to his disciples to reach all nations with the truth of His Gospel. It is important to
reference the fact that Jesus went to great lengths with teaching intentional discipleship. First,
Jesus spent three years of his earthly ministry discipling the original apostles, and then he
continued the discipling process by spending an additional forty days after his resurrection
proving from the Scriptures the messianic prophecies that spoke about him. In Luke 24:27 on the
road to Emmaus after the resurrection, Jesus said to two of his followers, “And beginning with
Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning
himself.” Notice, that in this particular account, it was a prerequisite for Jesus to open the eyes of
his followers concerning his messiahship from the Scriptures beginning with Moses and all the
prophets in order to reciprocate the disciple-making process. It is imperative for a person’s eyes
to be opened to all the messianic prophecies mentioned throughout Scripture and how they all
point to Jesus Christ as the only person in all of human history who could fulfill them before a
disciple can be invigorated to witness the Gospel to others. Once the eyes of the two men were
opened to the Scriptures and they recognized who Jesus was in the text, notice their actions in verse 33: “They got up (the two men) and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them assembled together and saying, ‘It’s true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’” Without the prerequisite of being persuaded that Jesus is the resurrected messiah prophesized according to the Scriptures, the two would not have returned to Jerusalem to share their conviction that Jesus is the actual risen savior. Likewise, in order for the Great Commission and discipleship to be effective, the followers of Jesus have to first be unequivocally convinced in their hearts that Jesus is the Son of the Living God who was resurrected from the death of crucifixion according to the messianic prophesies. Without the revelation of Scripture and the Holy Spirit convicting the hearts of God’s people that Jesus is the risen savior, how will disciples implore others to follow Him...?

Notice also, that it was only after Jesus’ demonstration of the messianic prophesies and devotion to discipleship that He would then send the apostles to accomplish three essential components to the Great Commission according to Matthew 28:19: to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them under the triune God, and to teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded in the Gospels. Additionally, in the Gospel of Mark 16:15, there is another element of the Great Commission that is just as vital, which is the “proclamation” of the Gospel. Jesus said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” In Matthew 24:14, Jesus also said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” The proclamation of the Gospel is another indispensable component of the Great Commission that cannot be disregarded. The Greek term for preach, “kerysso,” means to publicly proclaim openly the Gospel of Jesus Christ with

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urgency, and with warnings of consequences for not accepting the true gospel of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{62} The proclamation of the Gospel is ultimately the first essential element of the Great Commission that initiates intentional discipleship. Paul said in Romans 10:14, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” Similarly, how can America return back to the Lord in repentance unless those who are called to proclaim the good news preach the Gospel with passion and conviction, and admonish America of the consequences for not accepting the true gospel? Disciples who have already been discipled are mandated according to Scripture to go into the public square as directed by the Holy Spirit and preach the gospel and share their testimonies of how God saved them. Disappointingly, the taciturnity of the Gospel is part of the statement of problem that has contributed to the age of relativism, which needs to be exposed in order to encourage the body of Christ to exercise the essential components of the Great Commission.

It is important to note however that the proclamation of the Gospel should not occur in a vacuum or without some kind of contextual understanding of one’s audience and culture. For instance, Paul in the book of Acts 17:22-24 possessed a keen awareness of his surroundings when he said, “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown God. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.” Paul utilized to his advantage the context of his audience to relate and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This example is exactly what disciples in the

context of western civilization need to imitate as they interact within the context of their local
communities to effectively proclaim the Gospel. Hence, Paul’s approach in Acts 17:22-31 to
contemporize and take advantage of his cultural surroundings in order to preach the Gospel
provides an effective blueprint for the church to adopt that will in assist in redirecting the
disciples of Jesus back to the true mission of Christ and his church that will encourage God’s
people to repent from their sins and unfollow the culture. Just as the results of Peter’s preaching
of the Gospel and admonition of his perverse generation led to the repentance of three thousand
souls in Acts 2:41, likewise, the church must also understand the climate of the culture, raise its
voice, proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and become the countercultural institution God called
her to be for the primary purposes of eternal salvation and reciprocal discipleship.

The Commission of the Church

Then once an individual repents of their sins and receives the Lord Jesus Christ into their
heart after the proclamation of the Gospel, the mission of discipleship continues onward through
the body of Christ, the local church where individuals coming to faith can be baptized and be
taught to obey everything the Lord commanded. Paul said in Ephesians 4:11-13, “So Christ
himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his
people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in
the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole
measure of the fullness of Christ.” This verse speaks to the very essence of the mission of the
church and how God sends spiritual leaders to fulfill the assignment of the church. The church is
supposed to be in the spiritual venture of making disciples, not just mere coverts to the Christian
faith who claim the name by title, but not becoming actual disciples of Jesus. Instead, “Christ
gifts leaders so that they can train believers to exercise their own respective gifts for ministry
rather than do all the work for them.”\(^{63}\) So, this idea that a Christian after receiving the salvation of the Lord is not obligated to become an active member of the local body of Christ, or become a disciple, or serve the Lord, or utilize their respective gifts to edify the church, or exercise their part in the Great Commission, or be the salt and the light Jesus has called them to be on the earth is contrary to Scripture. The mission of those whom Christ sends forth equips the body of Christ to exercise their gifts distributed by the Spirit according to Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 1 Peter 4:10-11, and 1 Timothy 4:14-16; to essentially reciprocate the disciple-making process. This understanding of the mission of Christ and his church is foundational to effective discipleship. Unfortunately, optional Christianity in America along with a diluted preaching of the Gospel has unknowingly persuaded many Christians to become followers of Christ by name and not by mission; ultimately affecting the spiritual growth and maturity of the church in America and partly contributing to the secularization of the land.

According to *Encountering Theology of Mission*, “The church remains God’s primary agent to accomplish his purposes in this age.”\(^{64}\) The church is supposed to be more than just inviting people to church to gain an emotional/spiritual experience. “It is making disciples and further forming these disciples into living cells of the body of Christ – new expressions of the community of God’s people.”\(^{65}\) The church, also known as the ekklesia in Greek is composed of believers in Jesus Christ who come together in solidarity to worship God, to fellowship together, to serve Him and his people, and to advance the kingdom of God beyond the local gathering by


exercising their part in the Great Commission. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* describes the church as: “Thus the church is the spiritual family of God, the Christian fellowship created by the Holy Spirit through the testimony to the mighty acts of God in Christ Jesus. Wherever the Holy Spirit unites worshipping souls to Christ and to each other there is the mystery of the church.”

In the New Testament, Jesus chose twelve disciples to follow him throughout his three-year ministry and after his resurrection, He dispatched all of his disciples including Judas’ replacement Matthias to carry on the baton of discipleship in the early church. For the sake of clarity, the early church solely constituted disciples commissioned with the divine charge to reach the lost and make disciples of all nations baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything the Lord commanded, which reciprocated throughout subsequent generations, but somehow reversed course within the past twenty years in America. As Chris Shirley affirms, “Raising up successive generations of committed disciples is the responsibility of the local church,” and the church needs to get back to its roots of intentional discipleship that allowed Christianity by the grace of God to become the most revolutionary divine power the country has ever witnessed. According to Shirley, “The local church is composed of disciples who should be investing themselves in the lives of other disciples,” and the all-encompassing task of making disciples i.e. teaching them how to follow, repent, learn, and obey Jesus “is the curriculum of this Christ-focused school for making disciples.”

The mission of the church is defined as such according to *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*: “Public worship is the encounter of the risen Redeemer with his people; evangelism is

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67 Shirley, *It Takes A Church To Make A Disciple*, 212.

68 Ibid., 212.
calling men to the Savior; publishing the law of God is proclaiming his lordship; Christian nurture is feeding his lambs and disciplining his flock; ministering to the needs of men is continuing the work of the Great Physician.”  

Essentially, the commission of the church is the mission of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and his disciples. Only disciples can make disciples! Paul Hertig succinctly puts it like this in his article: “Mission is the church sent into the world, to love, to serve, to preach, to teach, to heal, to liberate.”

This mandate to be intentional with teaching discipleship should encourage the people of God to mature as believers in Christ and prepare them for works of service. In short, the essentials of the Great Commission must include being persuaded that Jesus is the promised messiah according to Scripture, have a general understanding of the messianic prophesies, proclaim the true gospel of Christ with urgency and admonition as God calls each believer uniquely, make disciples by connecting believers to a local body of Christ so they can grow, mature, and attain the full knowledge of Christ, baptize them under the triune God, teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded, and prepare them for works of service so they can reciprocate the disciple-making process.

Moreover, not only has the church softened its voice on certain moral issues that led to the corruption of American culture, but many churches have evolved their own philosophy on homiletics and evangelism to attract the unchurched in response to an already degenerating culture; thus, leading to the Mega/Emergent Church, which this research will now focus its attention on. Consequently, the emphasis on attracting unbelievers to the church has reduced the foundational component of discipleship and the Great Commission. Meaning, the fullness of what it means to be a true disciple, the cost, the sacrifice, and the mission being a disciple

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requires has been denigrated. As Jared Wilson asserted in his book, *A Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against The Status Quo*, the attractional church model “is a way of ministry that derives from the primary purpose of making Christianity appealing.”71 The attractive-based philosophy of the Mega Church along with its methodology has not only deconstructed the Gospel message and facilitated in the overall reduction of the church in America without many of them even knowing it, but has contributed to the statement of problem. Bill Hull brings attention to the present state of the church in America in his guide, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* when he claims, “In America in particular, we’ve crafted the gospel message to produce results. We measure God’s blessing by how many people decide for Christ by coming forward or raising their hand.”72 Many churches in America have become more invested with measuring physical growth and success, with how many people come to the front of the church during altar call, and in the process have forsaken the inward spiritual transformation required to become a disciple. This thesis project will challenge the attractive-based model from a biblical perspective by reminding its readers of the very unappealing tenets of the Christian faith which have far greater power to transform a sinner unto repentance. Too often, there is an unbalanced preaching of the Gospel that extracts the appealing aspects of the Christian faith such as God’s grace and love while detracting from the unattractive and redemptive means through the work of the cross that provided atonement for every believer. This is not to say that there shouldn’t be an emphasis on the love of God, which is the greatest theological virtue. However, there is a misconception of the Christian life that Bonhoeffer exposes that says, “I can go and sin as much


as I like, and rely on this grace to forgive me, for after all the world is justified in principle by grace. I can therefore cling to my bourgeois secular existence, and remain as I was before, but with the added assurance that the grace of God will cover me. It is under the influence of this kind of grace that the world has been made Christian, but at the cost of secularizing the Christian religion as never before.”73 This cheap grace that Bonhoeffer refers to is the primary emphasis of many mega churches whose philosophy is centered on pragmatism, physical growth, revenue, and attracting the unchurched with this gospel of cheap grace instead of focusing on costly grace, sin, repentance, separation from secular culture, and discipleship. “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”74 This cheap grace is the grace that attracts the flesh of the unchurched, which has ultimately secularized the mega church at large and manufacturing lukewarm Christians. Hence, teaching intentional discipleship needs to accentuate the cost of God’s grace and redemption through the cross of crucifixion; those unattractive means of the Christian faith that will make true born-again disciples who are able to minister the Gospel in an age of moral relativism.

Additionally, when it comes to proclaiming the true gospel of Jesus Christ that speaks contrary to secular Christianity, the commission of the church must remain faithful to her assignment regardless of the ever-evolving culture. In particular, Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2 is a perfect reminder of the unattractive means of redemption, which says: “Just as there were many who were appalled at him – his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being

74 Ibid., 44-45.
and his form marred beyond human likeness” – the Suffering Servant “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.” Pinpointing the severe means by which believers are redeemed will counter the attractive model and demonstrate that eliminating the foundational elements of the Gospel message that are unappealing to the unchurched not only reduces the power of the gospel message and the work of the cross but is in danger of producing lukewarm Christians and non-disciples. Furthermore, it will be important to elaborate on the unpleasant manner salvation was purchased when Jesus said that “he will be delivered to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.”\textsuperscript{75} All of this was not only prophesized but accomplished to atone sinners from their moral depravity, and embodies a substantial role in the doctrine of soteriology, which cannot be neglected. There is nothing regarding how the Lord delivered the world from their sin except His loving mercy that is appealing to the sinful flesh. Once that point is made clear, then it will hopefully convict the hearts of those whom the Holy Spirit leads to repent and realign their understanding back towards the true nature of the gospel. It is integral for many churches to recalibrate their attractive-based philosophy back to the biblical-based gospel of Jesus Christ so the church can prioritize the essential elements of the Great Commission.

\textbf{Theological Foundations of Being a Disciple}

Part of the basic elements of the Great Commission as mentioned previously must incorporate a thorough comprehension of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. In this next section of the research, the theological basis of \textit{Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age

\textsuperscript{75} Luke 18:32-33.
of Moral Relativism will outline the five essential elements of discipleship. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” In Luke 14:33 Jesus also said, “In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.” Just these two verses alone shed perspective regarding the magnitude of what it means to be an actual disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. He commands his disciples to deny their sinful flesh, to take up their cross, to follow him, and to practically give up everything that will hinder them from obeying Him. Jesus does not give his disciples a multiple-choice selection as to which aspect of being a disciple they want to choose. Yet, multiple-choice discipleship is exactly what Satan has been dangling over the Western church. Nevertheless, the definition of a disciple, matheteuo (G3100) according to the Greek language, means to follow as a disciple, to train in discipleship, and to be disciplined and instructed.76 Chris Shirley in his article, It Takes A Church To Make A Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship For The Church states, “Literally, disciple means learner; the Greek word mathetes is the root of our word mathematics, which means ‘thought accompanied by endeavor. Disciples think and learn, but they also move beyond learning to doing the endeavor.”77 Intriguingly, the term disciple also has a pre-Christian existence in the Greek culture, which was translated as “a person following a master – among the great masters of Greece. Plato, Socrates, and Herodotus all used disciple to mean learner or one who is a diligent student. These and other Greek philosophers generally understood that the disciple’s life involved apprenticeship, a


relationship of submission, and a life of demanding training.” In other words, the concept of discipleship wasn’t a foreign concept during the time of Jesus and his disciples. Likewise, discipleship is not a foreign concept in today’s Western culture. It’s just unknowingly on the wrong side of the isle. Unfortunately, America is garnering more disciples for Satan, other religions, Hollywood, celebrity athletes, entertainment, social media, science, materialism, social justice, etc., while the list for born-again disciples continues to shrink.

Even though many cultures and religions produce their own disciples, the term itself can also be found in the Hebrew language dating back approximately five hundred years before the dominance of the Greek empire. The prophet Isaiah 8:16 says, “Bind up this testimony of warning and seal up God’s instruction among my disciples.” Now, the Hebrew word, limmud (H4341) means “accustomed to; a disciple, one who is taught, a follower.” After compiling all of these evaluations on the term disciple, there are a variety of themes at work that must travel beyond a person’s intellectual assent to their actions and how they live and serve the Lord. Most of the descriptions contained in the definition for disciple requires action on behalf of the believer. McKnight affirms this interpretation in his research when he says, “The Gospel doesn’t work for spectators; you have to participate for it to work its powers.” This idea that one can claim the title Christian without actually becoming a disciple of Christ is simply unbiblical and a false gospel. Even the Greek word for Christian, Christianos (G5546) according to the Greek lexicon means, “follower of Christ;” one who actively pursues Christ, not by mere belief in Him. The term discipleship, although not specifically mentioned in the Bible is the process of

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80 McKnight, The King Jesus Gospel, 28.
following Jesus.81 “The suffix ‘ship’ is derived from the Old English ‘scipe,’ meaning ‘the state of, contained in, or condition.’ Discipleship is the state of being a disciple; we are always in the condition of being disciples – loving Christ and obeying our Master.”82 According to the article by Paul Hertig, “Discipleship is a central theme in Matthew. The term ‘disciples’ describes Matthew’s specific ecclesiological disposition. ‘Disciples’ occurs 73 times in Matthew, 46 times in Mark, and 37 times in Luke.”83 The specificity Hertig offers regarding the numeric usage of the word “disciples” is compounded evidence against the false notion that discipleship can be an optional component of the Christian faith.

Now, when it comes to the theological foundations of being a disciple, there are five important components to discipleship that are central to include: repentance, following Jesus in faith, holiness, suffering, and missions. Although these five components do not identify all of the elements or characteristics a disciple should exercise or exhibit, it covers the central marks of what it means to be a true follower of Jesus Christ. The reason why this research chose to magnify these particular features of discipleship is simply because they are trivialized in many churches in America. It is important to emphasize that discipleship is not just another church program but is “fundamentally about the choice to follow Jesus, it needs to be a way of life for all of life.”84 Discipleship is nothing short of a lifestyle centered on being transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, not an optional program Christians get to pick and choose. As Hull asserts, “The most damaging result is that churches categorize discipleship as just one of the

81 Shirley, It Takes A Church To Make a Disciple, 210.

82 Ibid., 211.


ministries of the church, rather than the core of the ministry.”

Therefore, this section on the elements of discipleship are mandatory requirements of what it means to be a disciple.

The first fundamental principle of discipleship, repentance, is a prerequisite to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. Without repentance and without being born again, not only is it impossible to become His disciple, but entrance into the kingdom of God is inaccessible. Notice that in the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry after He overcame the temptation of Satan in the wilderness, He authenticated the same message of John the Baptist in Matthew 4:17 to “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” The Greek word for repent metanoeo (G3340) means “to undergo a change in frame of mind and feeling; to make a change of principle and practice; to reform.”

Intriguingly, in a postmodern era where many are driven by feelings and emotions, biblical repentance also includes a change in how a person feels towards God, their sinful nature, their neighbor, their enemies, and the Gospel message. Repent according to Darrell Bock, “calls for rethinking the way we relate and respond to God.”

There is an obligation upon the individual coming to Christ to respond to the call of the Gospel, which is done through living a constant life of repentance that is consistent with the command to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance” according to Matthew 3:8. In fact, repentance is so central to the Christian faith that the very first thesis of Martin Luther’s Ninety-five Theses says, “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, ‘Repent you, etc.,’ intended that the whole life of his believers on earth should be one of constant penance.”

Moreover, this foundational factor of repentance is not just a New

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Testament concept as mentioned previously. “The term ‘to turn’ is rooted in the Old Testament idea of ‘shuwb,’ which is the Hebrew word for repent.” In Deuteronomy 30:9-10, Moses told the nation of Israel, “The Lord will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your ancestors, if you obey the Lord your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and ‘turn’ to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” Even the prophet Ezekiel strongly exhorted the people of Israel twice to “Repent (shuwb)! Turn (shuwb) from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices.” This language of “turning to the Lord” is in keeping with the message of repentance throughout the New Testament. The apostle Peter imitates the same message when he said in Acts 3:19, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.” Hence, repentance is the prerequisite for becoming a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

The second fundamental principle of discipleship that should occur subsequently after repentance is simply “to follow” the Lord Jesus Christ “in faith.” The concept of faith is central to discipleship and rooted in the Word of God. The statement, “the righteous shall live by faith” is reverberated throughout Scripture in Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17. Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. Without the component of faith, discipleship is unfeasible from a Gospel-centered perspective. Jesus exhorted his disciples in Mark 11:22 to “Have faith in God.” Additionally, in Matthew 10:38, Jesus said, “Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” The word follow according to the Greek language, akoloutheo (G190) means, “to follow as a disciple, to imitate.” In other words, to follow Jesus Christ as His true

89 Bock, Recovering the Real Gospel, 82.

90 Ezekiel 14:6.

disciple cannot be done without a willingness to unfollow themselves. However, following after Jesus in the context of Scripture is a multifaceted endeavor. Following after Jesus is more than just following Him in one’s mind saying, “I believe in Jesus” while their life bears fruit contrary to the life of Christ. To follow after Jesus literally means to become his disciple and to imitate his life in thought, word, and deed. Following after Jesus is a wholistic, intentional, and an all-encompassing submission of one’s life to Jesus and His will. Following after Jesus requires a person to bear good fruit; the fruit of the Spirit outlined in Galatians 5:22. Jesus also said in John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last,” which correlates with the already repeated command in Matthew 3:8, to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. Fundamentally, a Christian is a disciple; a person who follows and emulates their life after the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and deed according to the Gospel and bears spiritual fruit. Dallas Willard asserts, “A disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice – a practitioner.”\(^92\) “As disciples (literally students) of Jesus, our goal is to learn to be like him,”\(^93\) which can only occur through a sincere imitation and devotion to the study of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Disciples must move beyond their learning, respond in obedience to the Lord’s will, and must always remember, “whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”\(^94\) To follow after Jesus practically encompasses all of the stipulations of what it means to be a true disciple. This does not include other essential components not expanded on in this section such as baptism and the enormity of being born-again by the Holy Spirit. It is consequential for disciples to grasp the full dynamic of what it means to follow the Lord in thought, word, and deed.


\(^93\) Ibid., 24.

\(^94\) 1 John 2:6.
Another foundational principle of discipleship that is equally imperative is holiness, which without, makes reciprocal discipleship impossible. In 1 Peter 1:15-16 it says, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” This same command to be holy is the exact same command given by God to Israel multiple times in Leviticus 11:44, 19:2, and 20:7. In fact, in Hebrews 12:14 the author exclaims, “without holiness no one will see the Lord.” To be holy according to the original Hebrew language, qados (H7705) means to be “sacred, consecrated, set apart as dedicated to God; by extension: pure, innocent, and free from impurity.”

Just as the nation of Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests according to Exodus 19:5-6 which required them to obey the Lord’s commands in order for them to be a holy nation, similarly, the followers of Jesus must also become “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s special possession according to 1 Peter 2:9.” Unfortunately, ancient Israel along with many Christians today have missed the mark on the gravity of achieving holiness as children of God, which is one of the reasons why the culture in America is growing more secular and the church is becoming more liberal in certain fundamental doctrines such as discipleship. Besides, even though ancient Israel failed to consistently uphold the holiness code, Paul reminds the church in 1 Corinthians 10:11 to consider Israel’s past transgressions as examples so the body of Christ does not yield to the same temptations. Hence, the premiere ingredient to achieving holiness is through faith and obedience to the Word of God, because without faith, it is impossible to be his disciple! Discipleship without obedience, without faith, without the Holy Spirit, and without application cannot achieve holiness. Obedience is an indispensable component of holiness that is rooted throughout Scripture, which finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

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The fourth major element of discipleship that often gets overlooked is suffering, which many are unprepared for; the suffering that comes with following Jesus as his disciple. It is important to realize that in order to be a disciple of Jesus, one cannot circumvent the fact that picking up the cross will involve a certain level of suffering and sacrifice. There are two reasons why many Christians avoid becoming a disciple of the Lord. First, as mentioned previously, they were unaware that the two, Christian and disciple are inseparable, not optional. Second, stems from a lack of understanding that discipleship is normally accompanied with some degree of persecution and possible martyrdom. Many believers want to claim the Christian title and live by their own terms, but many do not want to suffer for Christ sake and live on his terms! When Jesus spoke the parable of counting the cost of being a disciple in Luke 14:25-35, first, he reminds his disciples that “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple.” Then in verse 38, Jesus asks the rhetorical question, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?” In other words, Jesus is not only challenging his disciples to consider the cost of being his disciple, but he’s also reminding them of the great sacrifices that will have to be made in order to be his disciple, which will automatically involve some level of suffering. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ, there has to be a sacrifice of oneself, a sacrifice of certain family members who do not accept one’s commitment to follow Jesus, along with a sacrifice from the secular world. There is nothing in all of creation that a disciple is to love more than the Creator of all things! Paul and Barnabas both preached in Acts 14:22, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul confirms the previous verse when he emphatically declares, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Ray Barraclough confirms this irresistible suffering in his reassessment of Luke’s political
perspective as such: “Within Acts Luke presents situation after situation of danger for Christians in which they are innocent but face such persecution that at times leads to martyrdom. So, Luke records the harassment of the Jerusalem church, the martyrdom of Stephen and James, the imprisonment of Peter, Silas and Paul, the latter’s readiness to die for the sake of Christ, and the promise of suffering not only for him but for his fellow disciples.” 96 There is so much more that can be said regarding how much the disciples of Jesus Christ must suffer for his name sake. In 1 Peter 4:16 it says, “However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” Therefore, when it comes to the foundational principles of discipleship, it must be prefaced to the people of God that following after Jesus Christ will involve some level of suffering. The extent of that suffering will look different for each person, but make no qualm about it, there is a cost of being a disciple, and that cost at a minimum is losing a life to self for the sake of gaining a life in Christ for all of eternity! As Jesus made abundantly clear in several instances in Matthew 10:39, 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, and John 12:25, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”

So, up to this point, there are four major themes for discipleship that have been discussed, which include repentance, following after Jesus in faith, holiness, and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Once the disciples of Jesus Christ understand these necessary tenets of discipleship, then they are to participate in the mission of the church. As a body of baptized believers operating in unity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they are to duplicate the disciple-making process. In Gorman’s book, Becoming the Gospel, he states, “Both Paul and his communities are called to participate in the saving mission of God, indeed to embody it.” 97


97 Gorman, Becoming the Gospel, 41.
missional aspect of discipleship is not optional, but an essential component encouraged by Paul in his letters and commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ in all four Gospels. The whole process of discipleship is to prepare disciples for the mission of Christ, which is the mission of the church. Once a disciple repents of their sin, receives the baptism of the Lord, follows the ways of Jesus, learns and obeys the Word of God, then they are ready to go out and make disciples as directed by the Holy Spirit and serve the Lord. “Authentic disciples labor for the kingdom through the active and ongoing witness of their faith in Jesus Christ and by using their Spirit-given gifts in service and ministry to His body.”98 That is what the church is supposed to be about; a body of committed believers becoming true disciples who make other true disciples!

**Theoretical Foundations**

Now, when it comes to the theoretical framework of this project and how this research will be applied in the context of the local church, it is important to reiterate to the body of Christ why the Great Commission and making disciples is the only spiritual solution to America’s moral relativism. Discipleship is not just meant to be another optional church program, nor is this ministry research project offering its readers a particular step-by-step model to follow. The Great Commission is to be the heart and central focus of the church with intentional discipleship being the primary emphasis. Every program, every function, and every ministry endeavor of the church should be aligned with the intent of fulfilling the Great Commission. This project has afforded *Christian Way Ministries* the opportunity to reexamine every aspect of its ministry to ensure discipleship is at the forefront of everything it does. Unfortunately, as Bill Hull made mention in his comprehensive research on discipleship, “the church in America has superseded the theoretical for pragmatism, creating a marketplace model of church and society.”99 In other

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98 Shirley, *It Takes A Church To Make A Disciple*, 216.

words, the objective of forming a theoretical framework is not to offer another practical guide to increase church growth and revenue, but to recalibrate the fundamental heart of the church to make disciples according to the Great Commission outlined in the Gospel.

Part of how this thesis project will implement a theoretical framework is by first identifying twenty individuals at minimum from Christian Way Ministries; ten members from the local ministry in Virginia Beach, and ten members in the Ronkonkoma district in New York that attend different parishes. Once the participants are identified, a prequestionnaire will be disseminated to test their knowledge regarding the meaning of discipleship, the Great Commission, the spiritual condition of America and the church, how relativism has affected the church, and what they believe to be important to them as believers. Then the conductor of this study will execute an eight-week course on all of the content contained in this chapter that will review the current religious landscape of America, explain the historical formulations of how America arrived to its moral and secular destination, describe how the Great Commission and discipleship are more than optional church programs, outline the essential elements of being a true disciple of Jesus Christ, and inspect the philosophy of the emergent church and compare it to Scripture. Then at the conclusion of the eight-week course, a post-questionnaire will be distributed seeking to explore the effectiveness of the course and how the participants intend on employing the applicable content in their personal life and ministry in order to fulfill their part for the Great Commission in an age of moral relativism. Once the two questionnaires are completed and returned, this research will then analyze the responses for any growth in their understanding on the several topics mentioned above and annotate those responses. These questionnaires are distributed for the purposes of testing their knowledge regarding Western Christianity while attempting to reform any misunderstandings of the Christian faith and challenging them to accomplish the mission of God in their individual context.
Chapter 3: Methodology

When it comes to the methodology for this particular thesis, there are many aspects of this project that need to be completed in order for it to be successful. The overarching methodology that will be employed for the exegesis of this ministry thesis project will be the Grammatical-Historical Method; a method that will seek to comprehend the true nature of discipleship from a literal perspective, not allegorically as some have come to understand it in American Christianity. Utilizing this approach will afford a comprehensive analysis into the various references cited above regarding the biblical intent of discipleship while employing the implementation of Scripture to substantiate the thesis that the Great Commission and teaching intentional discipleship is the most effective solution to realign many local churches back to the fundamentals of the Gospel in hopes of halting her spiritual and statistical decline. This approach will afford the research an opportunity to clarify the common misconceptions circulating the church in America in its own context, review the historical formulations as to how America arrived at its current relative state, and defend the thesis that intentional discipleship is the only spiritual solution in a dying and lost world. In order to validate this doctoral thesis, first, the action-based portion of this research will create eight lesson plans based on the content pertaining to discipleship, the historical formulations of moral relativism in America, and the essential elements of the Great Commission outlined in chapter two. Then it will develop eight Google-slide presentations to go along with those lessons to enhance learning. It will identify a specific number of participants from Christian Way Ministries located in Virginia Beach, Virginia, from Long Island, New York, and from anybody else who shows interest through the marketing endeavors to promote this course on social media and in the local Virginia Beach community and churches. There will be five hundred flyers created and passed out in the surrounding neighborhoods near Christian Way Ministries to gauge if there is any aspiration
especially among the local churches to advance their endeavors for the Great Commission. Furthermore, there will be a sponsored ad on Facebook by *Christian Way Ministries* to share the information of this eight-week course on discipleship that will target a fifty-mile radius of people who live in the local area of the church. For those who are interested in attending the course on discipleship, but do not live in the local area will be afforded the opportunity to attend the course virtually. A Zoom conference link to the live course will be emailed to those with a serious interest in attending the course virtually.

Once the course commences, attendance will be annotated in-person and virtually. As the Senior Pastor of the church at *Christian Way Ministries*, no prior authorization is necessary to utilize the church for this particular study. However, participants attending this course will be reminded that the course is strictly voluntary and will be recorded solely for the purposes of research and sharing the content of the course to those who had a desire to attend physically but were unable to due to schedule complications. Afterwards, an eight-week schedule will be created that will outline the course agenda for each session beginning Tuesday, January 26, 2021 from 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM and end on Tuesday, March 16, 2021. Each participant that attends and completes the entire eight-week course will receive a certificate of completion. Additionally, each participant will receive a free copy of Bill Hull’s book, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, along with a copy of this thesis when it is completed in effort to further equip and inspire the participants as disciples to make the Great Commission a priority. The intent of this particular section of testing the applied research will first gain a general consensus of the participants knowledge regarding discipleship, Western Christianity, moral relativism, and the Great Commission utilizing a pre-questionnaire that will be disseminated the week prior to the course. It will also measure the desire for discipleship in the local community and on social media in its marketing endeavors for the course on discipleship. It
is anticipated that the spread of the pandemic will hinder the desire to attend the course physically, which is why a virtual link to the course will be provided to those with serious intentions. Once these evangelistic undertakings have been exhausted to share the information of the course, then the research will analyze the responses to the survey, itemize the content outlined in chapter two into eight sessions, and challenge the participants to consider how they are going to fulfill the missional mandate in their individual and corporate context as true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Intervention Design**

In regard to the intervention design of how the research will be conducted, it is important to note that there will be additional content discussed in this particular section that was not expounded on in chapter two. As mentioned previously, the topics discussed in chapter two are not comprehensive, but just a general overview. However, the intervention design that will be implemented to apply the research will provide more of an opportunity to elaborate on a number of topics not afforded in the confines of this thesis. On a side note, there are some limitations to this research that will prevent this project from proving beyond a shadow of a doubt the original thesis statement to include: a limited pool of participants, not enough time for the participants to report back their discipleship endeavors to confirm or invalidate the thesis statement, the presence of COVID-19 that will hinder the full participation of the eight-week course on discipleship, nor will there be enough time in general to fulfill the desire of this project to distribute a free copy of this project to every church across the city of Virginia Beach. Needless to say, considering the immoral trajectory of Western culture along with the statistical and spiritual decline of the church this project must proceed forward despite these limitations to sound the alarm on the age of moral relativism and fulfill the Great Commission to affect change in the local context of Christian Way Ministries and beyond. In order to accomplish the
intervention design, this research project will incorporate all of the cited references in chapter two, organize the material into eight individual sessions that will flow seamlessly from beginning to end, create a Google slide presentation for each session that will enhance learning, provide a virtual Zoom conference link for the course that will provide for greater participation in the research, and distribute a free copy of Bill Hull’s book on discipleship. Mrs. Eleanor Makinen, a deaconess of *Christian Way Ministries* who leads a weekly women’s bible study out of her own home in Long Island, New York will assist with developing the Google slide presentations and ensure the participants who are attending the course virtually are able to access it on the Zoom conferencing platform.

Subsequently, a prequestionnaire will be disseminated prior to the beginning of the actual course so that the participants can complete it beforehand. The program, Google Forms will be utilized to create the prequestionnaire, disseminate it, and compile the results. The purpose behind selecting this particular platform is simply because it affords the research the opportunity to create an internet link to the questionnaire that can be sent either through email, text message, or published on Facebook. In a digital age, this method is capable of sending and completing the questionnaire in a matter of minutes instead of having to print the questionnaire, mail it, and return it, which could take up to two weeks. Additionally, once the participants submit their responses at the end of the questionnaire, Google Forms automatically tallies the answers into various graphs and charts and is also able to parse the results on a digital spreadsheet. The objective of this portion of the research is to collect as many completed pre-questionnaires as possible before the eight-course commences even if they decide not to participate in the actual course. This process will assist in obtaining a general consensus regarding the current moral climate in America, the church as a whole, along with their understanding of discipleship. The questions in the survey will contain a mixture of demographic, descriptive, knowledge-based,
and opinionated multiple-choice questions that will assess the knowledge of the participants on
the meaning of moral relativism, the spiritual condition of the church, their understanding of the
Great Commission, and their personal ministerial/church experience pertaining to discipleship.
The questions are not only specifically attempting to illicit their knowledge on specific topics
related to the research but drafted innovatively to inquire whether the participants unknowingly
believed some of the misconceptions advanced in the Western church today. For example,
question number eighteen asks the participant, “Do you believe there is a difference between a
Christian and a disciple?” This question was framed to assess the percentage of those who may
have believed there is a difference between the two, which would substantiate the “governing
assumption today, among professing Christians, is that we can be Christians forever and never
become disciples.”100 Another example asks in question twenty-one, “Does God call some to be
Christians and some to be disciples?” This question was drafted in a way to authenticate the
misconception that exists in the Western church that one can be a Christian, but not necessarily a
true disciple. The pre-questionnaire was written with the statement of problem as the primary
focus and written for the general population to complete in effort to compound the cited research
regarding the age of moral relativism and why the overall church in America is declining
statistically and spiritually.

**Week One: Introduction**

Once the pre-questionnaire has been disseminated, then the applied research will move
forward to preparing the lesson for each presentation based on the eight major sections of chapter
two outlined in the table of contents. As mentioned previously, in order to embark the change
necessary to reverse the curse of the age of moral relativism in America it must start by bringing

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awareness to the statement of problem, by explaining in specific detail the series of events that transformed America, and by inculcating the thesis as the ultimate solution to the problem within the local context. Week one of Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism will concentrate on some preliminaries such as ensuring the technological components for the Zoom conference and the livestream are working properly; certifying that all the participants in-person and online completed the prequestionnaire; ensure they understand the course is completely voluntary and recorded; that they receive a free copy of the Complete Book of Discipleship by Bill Hull; and logging all attendance for the purposes of data collection. Then the research will commence by introducing the speaker, the name of the course, the thesis of the project, and summarize the content on what the participants can expect to receive throughout the eight-week course. Afterwards, a list of terms that will be used throughout the course will be defined so when the participants hear the mention of these terms, they will have a foundational understanding of each word. Then the course will proceed into presenting the statement of problem pertaining to the statistical decline of religious affiliation and church growth in America. The course will reference specific variables that have contributed to the statement of problem to include sin, the spiritual battle, how Satan operates, several misunderstandings regarding the Christian faith, the natural desire to go beyond the Word of God, and the major spiritual influences of Gnosticism and the age of Enlightenment.

**Week Two: Statement of Problem**

In week two of Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism the course will continue to expound on the statement of problem regarding Satan’s overall attack on the absolute truth of God’s Word submerging America further into an abyss of unrighteousness. It will trace Satan’s transfer of influence from the Garden of Eden through the ancient Greek philosophers through the Age of Enlightenment in order to bring awareness to the oblivious
spiritual battle many churches are confronting. The prophet said it best in Hosea 4:6, “the people perish for a lack of knowledge.” Comparably, a lack of knowledge regarding how Satan is morally corrupting God’s people through various movements and philosophies are blinding them from the truth of the Gospel. Week two will focus on some additional contributing factors to include mass-media disinformation, election of representatives who do not fear God (influenced by Moses’ father-in-law Jethro in Exodus 18:21), the doctrine of progressivism, and the breakdown of the nuclear family. In The 1776 Report conducted by twenty-three members of the President’s Advisory Commission published in January 2021 states, “This is why America’s founding fathers often echoed the great Roman statesman Cicero in referring to the family as the ‘seminary of the republic.’ They understood that the habits and morals shaped in the home determine the character of our communities and the ultimate fate of our country.”

Hence, the breakdown of the nuclear family in America where many children are growing up in single parent households, where many fathers are absent, and where children are not being taught the absolute truth of God’s Word is a major factor contributing to the moral decline of America. The fact that many households are not training their children up in the ways of the Lord according to Proverbs 22:6 leaves the door wide open for them to be raised by the relative truth of the world. Lastly, week two will reference the redefinition of the doctrine of separation of church and state that divorced faith from many parliamentary institutions in America. It will underscore the loophole the founders left opened in the constitution that afforded moral relativism to spread, expound on the meaning of moral relativism, and introduce James Smith two-part argument on creaturehood and contingency outlined in his book, Who’s Afraid of Relativism.

Week Three: Historical Formulations

In session three of *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism* will continue the narrative of exposing Satan’s attack against America, against the church, and against God and His Word by demonstrating the same tactic he used in the Garden of Eden through various worldly philosophies. If this research had to identify one chief cause of moral relativism, it would have to point the finger at the intentional sin of humanity and for allowing the spirit of the antichrist to manipulate them with his relative truth and doubt! Week three will reference several verses of Scripture to include John 10:10, 2 Corinthians 11:3, 11:14, and Matthew 24:24 to amplify Satan’s overall disguise to deceive the people of God into believing certain movements that claim on the surface to better humanity, but only serve to demoralize America and the church. Many of these ideologies that are in pursuit of obtaining a greater knowledge beyond traditional religion and the Scriptures serve as a facade to Satan’s ultimate objective to seek, kill, and destroy. This will lead up to defending the necessity of Paul’s command in Ephesians 6:10-18 to “put on the whole armor of God so that you can withstand the wiles of the devil.” Moreover, one of the many warnings contained throughout Scripture cautions the people of God to be aware of false prophets, false apostles, false Christs, and to also be vigilant of worldly philosophies centered on human traditions instead of Christ according to Colossians 2:8. Part of what it means to be a disciple, a true follower of Jesus Christ in an age of moral relativism includes having a keen eye on the spiritual battle. Week three will continue to reinforce the implication of how Satan is infiltrating the church in America, along with having a solid understanding of history and possessing a thorough familiarity of the absolute truth of God’s Word. If disciples do not start with the presupposition regarding the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, “that the Bible is a supernatural book, God’s written revelation to his
people given through prepared and selected spokespersons by the process of inspiration,”
then everything in Scripture will be relative and questionable just as it occurred in the Garden of Eden when Satan posed the question to Eve in Genesis 3:2, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” Satan has been using this same tactic throughout history to get God’s people to doubt the absolute authority of Scripture in order to lead them into his many deceptions disguised under secular movements and worldly philosophies that have contributed to America’s moral relativism and the liberal church.

In particular, the Age of Enlightenment along with Charles Darwin’s publication of the Origin of Species that many have claimed to be “the work of the devil without any scientific merit,”
played a key role in the reshaping of America’s public education. Even though this ministry project could not elaborate on the devastating influence of Darwinian influence in Western culture, it is important to reference his naturalistic scientism according to Peter Burfeind in his work, Gnostic America, which states: “The theory itself may evolve but the element of God can never be allowed as a material cause. Some calculable force at some level must be discovered, therefore will be discovered. God must be given a nice burial, and humanity must go on without him.”
Hence, the theory of evolution, aspects of the Enlightenment period, Romanticism, much of ancient Greek philosophy, and the doctrine of Gnosticism are simply influenced by the spirit of Satan who continues to use pockets of these ideologies to sway societies from the absolute truth. Furthermore, the renowned Friedrich Nietzsche who is famous for his statement, “God is dead,” amplified the spirit of German philosophy into full blown

103 Elwell, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 415.
104 Burfeind, Gnostic America, 112.
atheism that metastasized across America today. In week three, the course will also take the participants on a journey through the various Supreme Court precedents beginning with the Scope Monkey Trials in 1925 along with Everson vs The Board of Education that abetted in the reshaping of America towards moral relativism. The primary culprit advanced by those seeking to reform America from its Christian roots in these supreme court rulings was the redefinition of the doctrine of church and state that governed into law the elimination of public prayer, Bible reading, the decalogue, creationism, while sanctioning contraceptives, evolution, abortion, and same-sex marriage. Of the forty-four establishment clause decisions rendered since Everson in 1947, all of them referred to Thomas Jefferson’s metaphor of separation of church and state completely divorced from his context and intent. What was previously known in America as moral truth and protected under the First Amendment slowly dwindled into the chasm of relativism that is steadily being radicalized through a rewriting of America’s history and faith practices.

Week Four: Detrimental Secular Philosophies

Once the historical formulations trace the pivotal events partly responsible for America’s moral relativism and the decreasing statistics of the church, week four of Teaching Intentional Discipleship will reiterate the rationale behind this eight-week course. It will restate the statement of problem, review some spiritual contributions to the statement of problem, reiterate what this thesis is defending, reinforce the importance of repetition in effort to retain critical information, and illuminate the purpose of participating in this eight-week course; to ultimately learn how to be true disciples of Jesus Christ in a post-postmodern age. This session will also challenge the participants to examine what they are following, and how they can test every spirit.

Week four will narrow in on the meaning of philosophy, reference Scriptural warnings against worldly philosophies in Colossians 2:8, and identify specific secular philosophies that have contributed to the moral demise of millions of people. In particular, it will review Karl Marx’s anti-religious philosophy that was adopted by several regimes led by the likes of Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao, Adolf Hitler, and others, and stress the enormity for disciples to be cautious with such worldly philosophies that have now permeated the walls of Western society. In 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, Paul warns the church to remove the old leaven of sin and wickedness out of their life and to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread in a new profound manner in Christ with sincerity and truth. Session four will relate this analogy to the participants by reminding them that just a little leaven of worldly philosophy or anything else not of God can corrupt their beliefs regarding the absolute truth of God’s word. It will also remind the participants that part of the reason why many departed from traditional and organized religion was due in part to the religious wars that spawned in the Middle Ages and beyond. However, these secular ideologies had greater fatal consequences, and although there is an attempt today to correct Marx’s ideology in America minus God, the manifestation of lawlessness in the post-postmodern culture is evidence that Teaching Intentional Discipleship is the ultimate antidote to the age of moral relativism.

**Week Five: Emergent Church Philosophy**

In session five of Teaching Intentional Discipleship, the course will continue to inculcate the meaning of moral relativism along with the need to hold firm to the absolute truth of Scripture in order to measure every other worldly claim of truth. The Scriptures impart disciples with a simple but powerful criterion for them to test any claim of truth in the world. In 1 John 4:2-3 it says, “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the
antichrst, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” Any claim of truth or philosophy that does not acknowledge Jesus Christ has come into the flesh must be cautioned and rejected. True disciples of Christ must turn away from any doctrines contrary to the absolute truth of God’s Word that can influence them to depart from the faith according to 1 Timothy 6:20. Even with all the philosophies and ism’s discussed up to this point that have been categorized as unbiblical, there are some philosophies that are craftily disguised as biblical and difficult to discern, with one of them being the philosophy of the Emergent church. Emotional sensationalism has become the new relative truth and adopted by many mega churches in America in effort to grease the engine of pragmatism in a culture that has morphed beyond truth and reason. Week five will highlight the tenets of the Emergent and mega church philosophy, uncover Peter Drucker’s secular management and leadership methodology that influenced many mega church pastors to embrace, and juxtapose their attractive philosophy with actual Scripture. The rationale behind exposing this particular philosophy is to correlate it to the statement of problem as part of the reason for America’s moral relativism and the overall decline of the church. Although the Emergent church philosophy is effective in maintaining physical numbers, the statistics demonstrate that their philosophy is ineffective in making true born-again disciples who are invested with exercising the Great Commission. The statistical decline of the church insinuates that attracting people to the church through emotional experience undermines the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and dangerously manufactures lukewarm Christians who do not hold fast to the absolute truth of Scripture or discipleship. The emphasis on emotion, experience, along with a methodology that constantly stresses the increase of attendance is essentially counterproductive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that offers salvation one disciple at a time by the most unattractive means of redemption, the work of the cross. The philosophy of every church must be purely based on the entire absolute truth of God’s word, not based on a secular
philosophy that promotes physical and quantitative results over the spiritual and qualitative condition of the heart. And speaking of the church, week five will also review the meaning and the purpose of the church, prove from 1 Timothy 3:15 how the church is “the pillar and foundation of the truth,” and briefly review some of the other apologetic philosophies that churches should become familiar with such as the Moral Argument advanced by William Lane Craig that deduces the existence of God through objective morality. The church is essentially the primary agent God uses to make disciples, to uphold and proclaim the absolute truth of the Gospel in an ever-changing world, and to defend Scripture with gentleness against secularism utilizing biblical-centered philosophies.

Week Six: Marks of a Disciple

In week six, the course will continue to expound on the meaning and purpose of the church, defend the thesis that teaching intentional discipleship is the fundamental key in restraining the age of moral relativism, define the Great Commission, outline the five essential components to the Great Commission, define discipleship, and describe what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ as explained in the previous chapter. Week six will outline the five primary components (repentance, following, holiness, suffering, and missions, which can all be summed up under the one word, following), and create a detailed slide of more than thirty marks of what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. For instance, the presentation will demonstrate for the participants attending the course a comprehensive outlook of the spiritual marks of a disciple who: repents, confesses, bears good fruit, denies themselves, picks up their cross, follows Jesus, separates from the world, meditates on the Word, suffers effectively, mission-minded, proclaims the Gospel, exercises self-discipline, captures every thought, resists temptation, obedient, born-again, tests every spirit, wears the whole armor of God, connected to the body of Christ, prays without ceasing, always rejoices, always give thanks, loves God above
all, loves their neighbor, loves their enemies, is led by the Holy Spirit, walks by faith, cautious of false doctrines, strives for perfection, practices humility, forgives others, exercises their spiritual gifts, testifies to the goodness of God, not ashamed of the Gospel, makes disciples, and participates in the Great Commission. These marks of a true disciple are all characteristics that were either exhibited, commanded, or practiced by Jesus Christ himself according to the Scriptures, and it is incumbent for all who claim to be disciples to manifest these spiritual qualities. Lastly, week six will also provide a graph demonstrating the necessity of disciples to become mission-minded by showing them how God from the beginning of creation embarked on a mission to redeem His people, and called specific individuals throughout history to join in His saving venture that continues on through the true disciples of Jesus Christ today. Jesus said in Matthew 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” In other words, the mission of God to redeem His people will continue until it reaches every tribe, every nation, every people, and every language before the end will come, which means, the true followers of Jesus Christ must be in the business of reciprocating the disciple-making process.

**Week Seven: Proclaiming the Gospel**

Once the participants digest the magnitude of what it means for the church to fulfill her command of the Great Commission and make disciples in an age of moral relativism, it is important to review the other essential component of the Great Commission, the proclamation of the Gospel. Part of the problem identified in the local context surrounding the church at *Christian Way Ministries* is that many believers do not know what to proclaim, how to proclaim it, how to engage the culture, or how to share their personal testimony to others regarding where God has brought them from. Week seven of *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism* will first, define the Gospel of Jesus Christ, trace the biblical formulations of
the Gospel, outline the essential elements, and demonstrate how believers can testify and share the Gospel in an age of moral relativism. According to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, “The gospel (good tidings) is the joyous proclamation of God’s redemptive activity in Christ Jesus on behalf of humans enslaved by sin.”¹⁰⁶ This gospel which was first announced in the Old Testament was a joyous proclamation of a future anticipation of redemption and deliverance that brought hope to the nation of Israel and granted the people of God a spirit of perseverance that enabled them to endure the diaspora. Furthermore, in the beginning of creation after the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:15, the pre-gospel also known as the protoevangelium was decreed; “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Although the consequences of Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God resulted in banishment from the Garden, a plan of redemption was pronounced, the process of atonement under the Old Covenant fashioned, and when the prophets predicted the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, the nation of Israel placed their hope in the good news of a future deliverer that would restore them from exile. The prophet said in Isaiah 40:9, “You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, Here is your God!”

The actualization of this good news of deliverance first announced in the Old Testament is ultimately realized in Jesus Christ, not effectuated through imperial might, but accomplished through Christ as a sacrificial lamb on the cross for the sin of the world. Hence, when it comes to understanding the essential elements of the Gospel, simply put, it involves the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ as

preserved in the writings of the New Testament. The good news is that Christ is risen from the grave, defeated death, crushed the head of Satan, provides atonement for sin, justifies sinners by his blood, grants eternal life to all who repent and confess Him as Lord and Savior, and restores what was broken in the Garden of Eden through Jesus’ mediation as the High Priest between God and man. Jesus himself quoted the prophet Isaiah in Luke 4:18-19 that, “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” After Jesus predicted, proclaimed, and performed the greatest news the world has ever seen or heard, he charged his disciples in Mark 16:15, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” The Great Commission of Jesus Christ cannot be achieved without the proclamation of the Gospel, which is the catalyst to making disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything the Lord commanded. Matter of fact, the proclamation of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ is the primary ingredient to effectuate the solution to this thesis project of Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism. Paul said in Romans 10:14, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

Once week seven substantiates the significance of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then it will review how the participants can exercise their part for the Great Commission. It will review what it means to be a witness for Christ, how disciples can share the gospel, how the average believer can testify to the goodness of God, and even review Paul’s account in Acts 17, which this project considers to be a model example regarding how disciples can use their
context and the culture to their advantage to proclaim the good news. In Acts 17:22-23, “Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To an unknown God. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.’” In the passage, Paul utilized his context to his gain of proclaiming the Gospel and likewise, disciples of Jesus Christ need to consider carefully the context of Western society and their local communities, use it to their advantage, be a witness for Christ, and fulfill their part of the Great Commission in a post-postmodern age.

**Week Eight: Role Play and Conclusion**

Lastly, in week eight of *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism* the course will briefly summarize all of the content reviewed throughout the past seven weeks to refresh the memory of the participants, which will lead into the next essential element of the Great Commission, which is baptism. Although, baptism appears on the surface to be self-explanatory, unfortunately, baptism is primarily performed in America as a bucket-list item instead of a life-transforming occasion. Just in the context of *Christian Way Ministries*, many members have chosen to be rebaptized simply because they did not know or understand the depth of what it means to be baptized. In a sense, many Christians today are receiving John’s baptism as was the case in Acts 19:3; a baptism of repentance without renewal. A baptism that emphasizes works of the Spirit over rebirth of the heart. Instead, the baptism that Jesus was referring to was one that cleanses from sin and transforms the heart. In John 3:5, “Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.’” According to the commentary contained in the *NIV Study Bible*, “Water in the OT often refers to renewal or cleansing, and the most significant OT connection bringing
together water and spirit is Ezekiel 36:25-27 where water cleanses from impurity and the Spirit transforms the hearts.”

Unfortunately, there appears to be more of an emphasis on the ritual of receiving baptism versus an in-depth understanding of being born-again by the Holy Spirit of God that transforms a person inwardly, something the law was incapable of accomplishing. In some traditions, there is more of a priority on the evidence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit than there is being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Many interpret instances such as Acts 8:9-17, 10:44-48, 19:1-7 out of its original historical context to justify their theological perspective of two baptisms. Yet, Paul clearly denotes in Ephesians 4, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope, when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Another key identifier often used to prove a disciple has the Holy Spirit is the gift of speaking in tongues. However, a true measure of a disciple is not only in the demonstration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but also the fruits of the Spirit, the circumcision of the heart, and how a disciple lives their life for Christ. When it comes to the teaching of baptism, a deficiency exists in the area of sanctification, regeneration, holiness, obedience, and commitment in regard to how a disciple is supposed to live a transformed life as a new creation. “Baptism carries with it the call to that which we should do in response or correspondence to what Christ has done for us. We do this in three related ways constantly kept before us by our baptism: the initial response of repentance and faith, the lifelong process of mortification and renewal, and the final dissolution and resurrection of the body.”

Paul stated in Romans 6:4, “We were therefore buried with him (Christ) through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through

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108 Elwell, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 130.
the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” In other words, baptism is more than just going through the motions of being immersed in water. It is a representation of burying a person’s old life of sin, replacing the heart of stone with a heart of flesh, and living a new committed life in the Lord Jesus Christ according to His Word that is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

**Discipleship Role Play**

Afterwards, the research will conclude the eight-week course on *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism* with four role-play scenarios on how the participants can exercise the Great Commission, proclaim the Gospel, be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, and testify to the goodness of God. The problem many Christians are struggling with today pertains to the lack of knowledge and encouragement by the church to fulfill the mission of Christ and reciprocate the disciple-making process. This segment of the course will be led by Darius Burton, one of the deacons at *Christian Way Ministries* who has demonstrated a passion for evangelism for more than five years in various types of scenarios. The four role-play scenarios include: *Be a Good Listener, Preaching to Crowds, Expect Opposition*, and *Walk the Christian Walk*. Although these scenarios are not comprehensive in nature and will not provide the participants attending the course an example of every possible situation disciples may encounter throughout their journey of following Jesus, they will however lend a glimpse of how God can use anybody in any given situation to be a witness for the faith. It says in 1 Peter 3:15 to, “Always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within you,” and the purpose of this role play at the end of the course on discipleship will exhort the participants to be intentional with seeking opportunities to give a reason for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
Chapter 4: The Results of Applied Research

Once the eight-week course on *Teaching Intentional Discipleship in an Age of Moral Relativism* is complete, then it will compile all of the results of attendance both physically and virtually, calculate the views received on social media, and provide transparency regarding the sentiments of the course shared by the participants. Now, it is critical to reiterate the limitations of the research during the pandemic and how it was assumed in the beginning that the desire to attend the course in-person would be hindered due to the fear of the coronavirus. However, prior to the COVID pandemic, there was a preexisting negligence of teaching intentional discipleship and the Great Commission by many churches as the ubiquitous solution to moral relativism in America. The statistics clearly demonstrate a sharp decline in physical attendance and religious affiliation within the past twenty years primarily because the church at large has forsaken the fundamental treatment prescribed by Jesus Christ approximately two thousand years ago that changed the world then and still possesses the transforming power to change the culture in America today if only the church would return back to fulfilling her responsibility. Essentially, the more hearts renovated for Christ, the less inclined people will be swayed from God’s word, from committing acts of the flesh, and from being deceived by the influence of the anti-Christ. *Teaching Intentional Discipleship* through the lens of the Great Commission is profoundly the most effective solution that is able to counter the post-postmodern age that must begin at the local level. It is important to remember that on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:41, three thousand souls were saved from their moral depravity. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only consistent, powerful, and transforming truth that can spark that kind of moral conversion. No other philosophy, worldview, or religion has ever demonstrated the degree of change that has benefitted humanity for the better than the radical Gospel that demands all who make a decision to follow Jesus to be born-again. Although, there is limited data to substantiate the thesis.
regarding discipleship as the spiritual antidote to the statement of problem plaguing the church in America, the Gospel message of Jesus Christ at its core is morally superior to any other worldview that if obeyed accordingly, contains the metamorphosing power to regenerate any culture in the world at any time in any generation.

**Prequestionnaire Results**

Fundamentally, the enthusiasm of this thesis to reverberate the millennia old command of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations is the only quintessential alternative to halt the runaway train of moral relativism. Hence, as mentioned previously, the applied research attempted to bring awareness to the statement of problem by first identifying some common misconceptions circulating western culture through a prequestionnaire disseminated online regarding the true meaning of being a disciple, the nature of a Christian, the essence of the Great Commission, the necessity of fellowshipping with the body of Christ, and the various dynamics of moral relativism. The responses generated from this prequestionnaire that contained thirty-five questions substantiated part of the statement of problem regarding the enormous disparity of Christian orthodoxy within the church. It is unfortunate that many churches are divided in America on many of the moral dilemmas contributing to moral relativism and are not holding fast to the absolute truth of Scripture. When it came to the question, “In regard to some of the moral controversies prevalent in American culture i.e., LGBTQ, abortion, euthanasia, gender selection, same-sex marriage, etc., do you believe God approves of any of these cultural norms,” twenty-five percent of the 206 answers responded “yes,” “not sure,” or “some of them.” Additionally, seventy-six percent of the respondents consider America to be growing more secular, seventy-one percent believe America is morally declining, seventy-four percent agree that Satan has significantly affected the current climate of America along with the decline of
the church, and fifty-three percent think the spirit of the Enlightenment period contributed to America’s secularism.

This statistic is consistent with another recent report conducted in 2020 by Barna Group in partnership with the Impact 360 Institute that collected data from over fifteen hundred participants ranging between the ages of 13 to 21 years old. In the report it disclosed that thirty-one percent strongly agree that “what is morally right and wrong changes over time based on society,” and that moral relativism is the majority opinion among Generation Zoomers (Gen Z) who hold to the belief “that many religions can lead to eternal life.” In other words, there is a new generation of young Americans born after 1996 who do not believe in absolute or objective truth, and the Barna Group considers this Gen Z to be “the first truly post Christian generation with only 4 percent adhering to a biblical worldview.” As it was articulated in the previous chapter, an amalgamation of variables have abetted to the destructive trend of moral relativism in America to include at minimum, a covert secular agenda enforced at all levels of education, a privation of moral absolutes being taught in the home setting, and unfortunately, the church (not all churches) in America compromising the truths of Scripture in hope to reach the Gen Z demographic. Even worse, twenty-two percent responded to the prequestionnaire that the church is primarily responsible for the immoral direction of America and the church. This response is consistent with the sentiment of several other references cited throughout this research that consider the church’s silence and capitulation to the moral direction of the culture as one of the reasons for America’s moral

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110 Klett, Moral Relativism Is the 'Majority Opinion,' *The Christian Post.*
relativism. Chris Smith documented this reality in his book *The Secular Revolution* when he stated, “A distinct and important group of players in the secularization of American public life were the many liberal Protestant leaders who capitulated early to the basic assumptions and standards of the secularizers and so helped paved the way for their eventual success. American mainstream Protestantism produced more than a few pastors and theologians whose survival strategy was radical accommodation to secular modernism.” Again, the age of moral relativism and the secularization of America was generations in the making, and now manifesting itself in a manner unprecedented in all of American history. In the beginning of America’s founding, the demographic was ninety-nine percent Protestant, and there were only four practical roads to secularize the nation: the election of government officials who do not fear God, mass-media, the university, and the church. Since the spirit of the Enlightenment period was steadily metastasizing its influence at the inauguration of the nation through the many university students who returned back to the New World after receiving a higher education in Europe, Smith believes the church attempted (although unsuccessfully) to respond to the external challenge of secularism by embracing it rather than rejecting it all-together. Hence, it is evident that “Liberal Protestant clergy were important players in the secularization struggles” of America.\footnote{Christian Smith, *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2013, 35.}

With that being said, it is not a coincidence that the two most significant drops in religious affiliation in the Gallop poll cited in the introduction came out of those who adhere to a liberal and progressive ideology. Additionally, out of the small sample size surveyed for this applied research, twenty-five percent responded to the prequestionnaire that America is

\footnote{Smith, *Secular Revolution*, 35.}
steadily evolving to meet the demands of the culture, thirty-two percent believe the church is spiritual deteriorating, and twenty-three percent think the church is statistically declining. Only five percent of the 206 participants believe the church is actually growing physically and thriving spiritually. This response to the current condition of the church in America is considerably the most startling response in the entire prequestionnaire. Once the church begins to conform to the patterns of the world and forsakes the absolute authority of Scripture as the arbiter between good and evil, the only outcome is moral relativism. Although, many mainline denominations are divided as a result of moral relativism, not all churches have fallen into the ditch of post-postmodernism. The fact that not all churches have sworn allegiance to the culture above the Creator is the motivating gear to raise the red flag on the statement of problem, to bring awareness to the evidence that meeting the demands of the culture only advances the work of the antichrist, and to campaign for a rededication to the millennia-old command of the Great Commission to Teach Intentional Discipleship, not as another church program, but as the only remedy of inward spiritual transformation one disciple at a time.

Another staggering outcome of the prequestionnaire that substantiated a portion of the research regarding one of the reasons why the church in America is statistically and spiritually declining pertains to the theological relativism, which has secretly infiltrated the body of Christ. Similar to how America entered into an age of moral relativism where absolute truth became subjective, likewise, numerous churches across the nation have allowed the spirit of relativism to alter some of their theological positions. The brother of James warned the church against this intrusion when he said in Jude 4, “For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” What used to be traditionally classified as Christian orthodoxy regarding morality, the classification of
sin, discipleship, the mission of the church, and what it means to simply be a Christian has produced a diversity of conflicting opinions. Bill Hull asserts that “the church in America has superseded the theoretical for pragmatism, creating a marketplace model of church and society.”¹¹³ Hence, in the process of being converted from orthodoxy to pragmatism, many churches have marginalized the absolute truth of God’s word by permitting moral relativism and the truth of the world to seek residence amongst the body of Christ. The fact that a countless number of Christians in America are struggling with understanding the basic tenets of the faith is an indication of how far the fruit has fallen off the tree. For instance, when it comes to the question on the survey, “Is there a difference between a Christian and a disciple,” forty-two percent believe that there is a difference, and twenty percent stated that “it depends.” Only thirty-six percent out of the 206 responses believe there is no difference between a Christian and a disciple. The fact that more than half of the respondents think there is a variance between the two corroborates the theological relativism that has crept in the body of Christ.

However, this is not the only misconception that has permeated the church in America. According to the survey, seventy-seven percent of the participants do not even believe a person must go to church and be connected to the body of Christ in order to be a Christian. On the surface of the prequestionnaire, it may appear that majority of the participants subscribe to a non-Christian worldview. Yet, this is not the case! Over ninety-five percent of the respondents who took the survey classified themselves with a Christian affiliation with one percent identifying as Messianic, while the other four percent acknowledged no religious affiliation. Not only is the above response baffling regarding the misconception that a Christian does not have to be connected to a local body of Christ, but that sentiment is in direct opposition to Scripture. In Acts

2:42-46 it details how the early believers, “devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.” The church in America today struggles to meet a few times a week, let alone meet together every day as was the custom of the early church.

Woefully, the influence of theological relativism has reached such a pinnacle in the church where many have come to believe that a person can be a Christian, enter into the kingdom of heaven, and receive God’s eternal inheritance without having any connection to the Bride of Christ. Those who have fallen victim to the progressive gospel have completely lost sight of Scripture, lost sight of the symbolism involving the Bride of Christ, lost sight of the mission of the church, and lost sight of the power behind the gathering of the saints in the name of Jesus, the greatest assembly there is in all the earth.

Hence, as much as this thesis aspires to ceasefire on the data authenticating the cited research from Pew Research, the Gallup Poll, and other sources, the runaway train of theological relativism is still gaining track. In regard to the questions on the survey involving discipleship and the Great Commission, this is where the accumulation of this statistical analysis can demonstrate to the reader how devastating theological relativism has been to the church in America. According to the results of the prequestionnaire concerning the emphasis placed on discipleship in their own ministries, twenty percent marked “no emphasis on discipleship” at all, fifteen percent consider discipleship as an “optional” program members should be involved in, and thirteen percent rank discipleship as one of many other church programs. Although fifty percent of the respondents consider discipleship the core of their ministries, the fact that the other half either possess no emphasis on discipleship or label discipleship as just another program not
only speaks contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but further reveals the depth of how far the spirit of deception breached the ranks of the church. Jesus admonished two of the seven churches in the book of Revelation, Pergamum and Thyatira regarding the danger of adhering to the teachings of those who do not hold to the truth of His Gospel. Sadly, many churches in America are failing to take notice of these warnings and of the data presented in this thesis regarding the statement of problem. It is a matter of critical importance for the body of Christ to recognize what Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote during World War II that “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”114 Bill Hull also insists in his book that discipleship is “the centerpiece of the Christian experience.”115 In other words, discipleship should be the cornerstone of every program, every outreach, and every function for every church in America and across the globe. Discipleship should not be just one of many church programs nor should it be robbed of its indispensability, but discipleship must be central to the existence of the church and to her vitality.

Another consequential deduction obtained in this research that cannot be ignored in regard to the prequestionnaire pertains to the tenure of church members and the reasons why many of the participants either switched ministries or lost faith in the church. Tragically, twenty-five percent either used to be or not connected to a local ministry partly due to the misconception that one can be a Christian without being connected to the body of Christ. Forty-seven percent of the participants reported only being with their current ministries less than five years, and the explanations why many of them departed their parishes are nothing short of disheartening. Out of the 160 responses to the question, “Have you ever left a church or ministry for any of the following reasons,” eighty-seven people (fifty-four percent) abandoned the fold due to a lack of

115 Ibid., 47.
spiritual growth. In other words, stagnation in the knowledge of God’s Word represents more than half of the reasons why Christians are leaving their church according to this survey. Again, this evaluation conducted on behalf of this research project is a microcosm of the overall statistical decline of the church in America. However, this analysis is indescribably consistent with the experience at Christian Way Ministries where a hand-full of members joined the church because they did not feel they were growing spiritually with their former church. As mentioned previously, a diluted version of the Gospel is leaving a desperate population of believers thirsting after righteousness and solid food, and compelling many to search out for other ministries who are invested in the absolute truth of Scripture. Matter of fact, fifty-four people responded to the survey that a watered-down preaching of the gospel was the primary reason why they left their ministries. Some other causes concerning why people left their church included style of worship, the church was too judgmental, service was too long or too short, change of leadership, their church was revenue-driven, and the church was closed for an extended period of time due to COVID.

In addition to the many aforementioned dynamics steering the statistical decline of the church in America, there were some other lamentable circumstances identified in the prequestionnaire. In reference to the question, “In your experience with the church, have you experienced any of the following actions,” fifty-four respondents felt that they were under-appreciated, twenty-four were either excommunicated or disfellowshipped, seventy-one were offended by another church member, and sixty-four witnessed some degree of toxicity in leadership. A combination of these symptoms affecting the church in America has severely inhibited her overall growth. Yet, what is even more undeniable regarding the prequestionnaire pertains to what this project considers to be the most essential piece to the whole puzzle as to why America became a secular nation and as to why theological relativism found a foothold in
the church. According to the survey, only fifteen percent believe the Great Commission is the primary mission for every follower of Jesus Christ. Additionally, twenty percent of the participants either believe it is not necessary for Christians to fulfill their part of the Great Commission or consider it to be an optional function of a disciple. In fact, only forty-four percent consider the Great Commission to be the “most likely” solution to America’s moral dilemmas, which is exactly what this thesis is attempting to defend. As mentioned previously in chapter one, “The only way to reverse the curse of moral relativism in America today is by bringing awareness to the steadily declining religious landscape of Western culture, by clarifying some of the common misconceptions surrounding Christianity, and by reemphasizing the fulfillment of the Great Commission that includes teaching intentional discipleship through the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ in order to make one disciple at a time transforming their hearts, and ultimately reciprocating the disciple-making process that will impact the context of the local church and possibly influence the entire nation.” Obviously, influencing the entire nation with the Great Commission almost appears illusionary in a post-postmodern culture. However, the spiritual concept of the Great Commission is the only solution that will bring divine and eternal results. As Jesus commanded Peter and Andrew in Matthew 4:19, “Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people,” likewise, disciples need to fulfill the command to go out and fish for people through the proclamation of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ that convicts the heart of his people to follow Him and reciprocate the disciple-making process in order to transform the local context of their respective ministry. Unless the church begins with the presupposition that the Great Commission is the definitive solution to counter the adversary’s endeavor to infect the nation and the church at large, moral relativism will presumably increase and strengthen its grip on America.
Although, the prequestionnaire was an effective approach to apply the research of this thesis, there were some imperfections identified after it was disseminated and completed. There could have been additional clarifying options implemented throughout the survey to acquire a greater inquiry on some of the questions. For example, the question regarding “When Christians should exercise the Great Commission,” there should have been an additional option that sought to evaluate how many of the respondents believe the Great Commission is a mandatory command to fulfill for every Christian, which would have provided greater clarity. Another drawback of the prequestionnaire pertains to the limited pool of participants who completed the survey. Obviously, the larger the number of participants who could have completed the survey, the more data could have been supplied to validate the research. The target of the prequestionnaire was to disseminate it a few days prior to the commencement of the eight-week discipleship course. After reflecting on this particular criterion, the research could have allowed it to remain opened until the conclusion of the eight-week discipleship course to garner additional completions, especially since there was no mandate attached to the survey to attend the discipleship course in order to complete it. Although the prequestionnaire was limited in its inquiry and in the amount of people who took the survey, the outcome was incredibly consistent with the cited research regarding the statistical decline of the church, why many are leaving the fold, along with the contemporary moral condition of the nation. It is disturbing to cogitate that seventy-six percent of the respondents believe America is growing more secular, seventy-four percent believe Satan significantly influenced the current state of the country and the church, fifty-three percent consider the Age of Enlightenment to be a major factor to her spiritual revolution, and seventy percent do not agree with the secular social justice movements to be the solution to America’s moral relativism.
Hence, if the church does not begin to sound the alarm on the available data, it is inevitable that apostasy will continue to increase, unrighteousness will continue to spread, and only the Lord knows what the state of the country will look like in the next twenty years. This is exactly why this thesis is proposing the Great Commission and teaching intentional discipleship as the only true remedy to transform the heart of the local communities. In fact, Paul reminds the church in Ephesians 2:14-16 that they have the true message of reconciliation, not the world. He said, “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” Although this passage was written long ago to a different audience, the essence of the message still applies to the context of America that has been divided into several social, political, and religious factions. Additionally, Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 5:19 “that God reconciled the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” God has given the world the only true message of reconciliation that can treat moral relativism, but unless the church as a whole in whom the message of reconciliation was given believes in the Great Commission as the only charge to reach a dying world, then the dividing wall of hostility will only continue to inspissate.

Results of Teaching Intentional Discipleship

After the dissemination and collection of the prequestionnaires, which concluded on Monday, January 25th, 2021, the thesis project proceeded to the next portion of applying the research by conducting an eight course on Teaching Intentional Discipleship in the local context of Christian Way Ministries in Virginia Beach that began the following day. Despite conducting this course in the middle of a pandemic, the outcome was slightly underwhelming considering
the amount of marketing put forth to promote this course in the local community. Many members of the church volunteered to deliver five hundred flyers around the surrounding neighborhoods and to share the information of the course to their friends, family, co-workers, and even on their personal social media pages. Christian Way Ministries also put a twenty-five-dollar ad on Facebook targeting a thirty-mile radius of the church that reached 2,175 people, but these efforts to promote the discipleship course did not yield any results. No one from the local community attended the course; only those who were either members of the church, connected to the satellite ministry in New York, or acquaintances of those associated with members of the church. Additionally, Christian Way Ministries attempted to target the local churches within a two-mile radius to sound the alarm on the research cited in this project. Unfortunately, most of them were still closed, and the one person the church did have an opportunity to share the information of the course with stated that he did not want to risk contracting the virus by coming to the course. Nevertheless, undeterred by the pandemic and the lack of interest in attending the discipleship course, Christian Way Ministries continued to press through on this very important project. According to the overall number of participants who attended the course, there were sixteen people who were present in-person at the church, and twenty people who joined the course online through Zoom. This is not including those who viewed the course on Facebook livestream or afterwards on YouTube. On the Christian Way Ministries Facebook community page, the discipleship course received 858 views and counting. On the Christian Way Ministries YouTube channel, the discipleship course incurred 246 views, over a thousand views in total. Candidly, this research must concede that the viewership of the course pales in comparison to popular channels on social media that average millions of subscribers. Although it would have been amazing to see this course on Teaching Intentional Discipleship reap the same results considering the eternal ramifications, the outcome was anticipated, especially considering all the
censorship targeting churches and conservative voices on social media. From experience of promoting the discipleship course in the local community of the church in Virginia Beach, it appears that the desire for the Great Commission and *Teaching Intentional Discipleship* has dissipated in the shadows of obscurity as the age of moral relativism continues to cultivate American culture.

In regard to the response to the course itself, the reviews were mixed. Majority of the participants were truly appreciative of the information given throughout the course along with *The Complete Book of Discipleship* by Bill Hull that was given to every person for free that either attended in-person or on Zoom. However, there were a couple of participants that did not complete the entire course for a variety of reasons to include schedule complications, the actual content of the course that contested the dogma of liberalism, and the complexity of the course in general. Although, the lessons defined all the terms utilized throughout the course and attempted as much as possible to simplify the content so that everyone could understand and follow along, some of the content was not received very effectively. One of the limitations of this project that was not mentioned previously pertains to the overall decline in literacy in America despite the more than five thousand universities across the nation. As of 2019, the Bayside district in the city of Virginia Beach where the church is located is below the district average for reading, scoring proficiency, and on-time graduation, which makes sense considering the push to underwrite critical race theory and other such doctrines into the public education versus emphasizing moral values and being a productive citizen. With the overarching desire to have everything simplified, anything that breathes an ounce of complexity can be discouraging to certain people.

Nevertheless, it was incumbent upon this research to remain faithful to its intent by not

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trivializing the material of the course that would inhibit the ability to present the research in its entirety. In the opinion of this research, the oversimplification of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is one of many reasons why the church in America is declining and in order to break this pattern, the church must present the Gospel in its fullness, challenge the hearers to advance their knowledge of the Word of God, and not be reticent concerning the more intricate doctrines of the faith and moral controversies afflicting the nation.

Overall, despite the few participants that withdrew from the class, those that remained were complimentary of the diligence put forth in each lesson to the extent that one of the participants suggested a role play scenario to enhance the course even further and to demonstrate how a disciple of Jesus Christ could exercise their small part of the Great Commission in various situations. This suggestion was such a great idea that the research dedicated half of the final lesson integrating four role-play scenarios that conveyed a visual example regarding how God can use his disciples to advance the Gospel message in addition to their individual testimonies of how good God has been to them, which can be viewed on the church’s website.117 Surprisingly, many who witnessed the enactments considered them to be one of their favorite parts of the entire eight-week course simply because they were never taught how to make disciples or share their testimonies. In fact, many believers did not think they were obligated as disciples to fulfill their part of the Great Commission in whatever capacity God has purposed for them, which lends further proof of the chasm that exists in the church in America as it pertains to the ultimate purpose for the church and for the disciples of Jesus Christ, to win souls. If this misconception of the faith exists in the small pool surveyed during the eight-week course on discipleship, how much greater for the church at large? The essence of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ has been lost

in the midst of pragmatism, in fear of not capitulating to secularism, and in the demonic
misguidance that Scripture is no longer absolute, which has resulted in the statistical and spiritual
decline of the church that essentially morphed America into an age of moral relativism.

Postquestionnaire

Interestingly, majority of the participants who attended the course did not consider the
Great Commission or intentional discipleship as a potential solution to America’s moral
relativism. One participant stated on the postquestionnaire that was disseminated at the
conclusion of the course that the lessons on teaching intentional discipleship opened their eyes
“of what true discipleship really is and just how important the Great Commission is.” Many
others had nothing but positive feedback to share regarding the information presented, but only
half of the participants who took the course in-person or online took advantage of the
opportunity to complete the postquestionnaire. Unfortunately, sixteen of the more than thirty
participants completed the end-of-course survey despite the multiple reminders. At most, this
section can only offer a glimpse of the overall feedback documented in the postquestionnaire.
Although this postquestionnaire contained fifteen questions, which was a much shorter version
than the thirty-five questions created in the prequestionnaire, the target was to obtain a general
consensus of how the course was received concerning the major topics relating to moral
relativism, the historical formulation of secularism in America, intentional discipleship, and the
Great Commission. All-around, one hundred percent of those who completed the survey have a
better understanding of moral relativism in America, believe that all church programs should be
centered on discipleship, and that disciples should always be intentional with looking for
opportunities to exercise the Great Commission. In regard to the ambiguity that a Christian does
not necessarily need to be an actual disciple, only two respondents were still uncertain on that
proposition. Even the questions pertaining to the requisite command of the Great Commission,
there was one person who was not convinced of its obligatory nature for disciples to fulfill. In fact, there was one person who was on the fence and there were four other people who were incredulous about the Great Commission being the ultimate remedy for moral relativism.

Sadly, the culture in America along with many churches are more inclined to attaching themselves to the results that come with a pragmatic philosophy, and since the Great Commission does not come with a step-by-step methodical approach to address the source of humanity’s moral corruption, the inward heart, some will be hesitant to jump on the train simply because they cannot see where it will go. Nevertheless, some of the other comments offered on the postquestionnaire ranged from being very informative, educational, awakening, and even soul-searching. Specifically, the historical breakdown regarding how moral relativism progressively ingratiated itself in the past century caught the attention of most. Many were ignorant to how America became the secular nation that it is today, and most of them knew that America has been morally declining but uninformed as to how America attained her secular status. Yet, more than half of the participants who took the postquestionnaire alluded to the historical formulation of moral relativism to be one of the most compelling lessons in the whole discipleship course. The litany of Supreme Court precedents that transformed the spiritual fabric of America from religious to a secular nation was undeniable. For others, the breakdown of the definitions in the beginning of the course, how to be a true disciple, the depth of each lesson, and how some churches allowed the spirit of relativism to infiltrate made the most impact. Overall, when it came to the question, “How will you now proceed in your life and in your church with being intentional with discipleship and exercising your part for the Great Commission,” all of the participants who completed the survey were invigorated to be more intentional with witnessing the gospel, sharing the word, making disciples, and being bolder in exercising their faith.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

All in all, the heart and soul of this research was to bring awareness to the various symptoms that have led America into the abyss of moral relativism and to invite anyone reading this research to earnestly reconsider the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ as the only true remedy to heal the country from her degeneracy and to adjust the eyesight of the church back to her true mission. For clarification purposes, it is important to address that whenever this project referenced a return back to the Gospel command of the Great Commission, it is not advocating for the return to the times of American slavery or the civil rights era. This assignment is marketing the timeless Gospel of Jesus Christ that has been proven effective, that has changed the lives of billions of people for the better, and that possesses the same power today to transform any person, any church, any community, and any nation diligently seeking holy conversion. However, without faith, it is impossible to please God, and similarly, just as impossible to fulfill the Great Commission without believing in its transformational efficacy. It is important to make mention that man alone cannot accomplish the saving work required to renovate America’s immorality, nor what this thesis is proposing. There are many social justice movements and secular organizations who are endeavoring to transform western civilization with their own strength and ideas, and depending on which side of the spectrum one stands on regarding the moral controversies that has caused a surplus of division, one thing is for certain…. America has digressed morally! The church is declining spiritually and statistically! The optics of the moral landscape scream division, not unification! America is divided politically, racially, morally, philosophically, socially, and religiously! Satan has indeed exploited the weaknesses of the nation that widened the gap of separation of people against people. What is even more devastating than what some are willing to acknowledge is the myriad of spiritless undertakings that metastasized America into an age of moral relativism with a point of no return. The
transition from the absolute truth of God’s Word to the relative truth of the world that is primarily contingent upon sensationalism is one of the reasons why the nation is corroding and now categorized as a post-postmodern culture. Think about it... America has practically eliminated God from government, excommunicated Him from public education, replaced the moral law with secularism, and in a sense, the glory of the Lord has departed many of America’s prestigious institutions. With many of these movements that are centered on the spirit of humanism versus the Spirit of God, the current results of America’s spiritual and moral decline should be of no surprise. Hence, until the nation along with many of the churches in America who have unknowingly replaced God with pragmatism invite the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ back into the equation and believe in the efficacy of the Great Commission it is predictable that America will continue to plunge deeper into the depth of depravity.

The only solution to reverse the curse of moral relativism in America along with any other country in the world is the Great Commission that is powered not by man alone, but through the perfect work of Christ on the cross and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is not a coincidence that Jesus commanded his disciples in Luke 24:49 to “stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” The apostles could not fulfill the charge of the Great Commission and make disciples on their own capabilities, but they needed to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit that would empower them to witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ and make disciples. Essentially, it was imperative for the original apostles to believe in the efficacy of the Great Commission and trust in the divine power of the Holy Spirit before they could fulfill the Lord’s directive to make disciples. In the testimony Jerry Rankin offers in his book, Great Commission Obedience regarding his ministry to Muslims, he reminds his readers that it was not by their wisdom or persuasive words that brought them to faith in Christ. No! “The only
explanation is the power of God that indwells the message of the Gospel.” Likewise, the true disciples of Jesus Christ cannot rely on themselves to accomplish the task God has set before them, but solely on the power of God who is able to commission them to proclaim the Gospel, to provoke the lost unto salvation, and to preserve them. This is precisely what the apostle Paul relied upon in Romans 1:16 when he said, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes; first the Jew, then to the Gentile,” which is the same power the disciples of the twenty-first century must receive and rely upon. Yet, this is not what has been occurring with many churches who have all-together bypassed the Great Commission, withdrawn from teaching intentional discipleship, and replaced the Holy Spirit with pragmatism. As a result, many churches are following in the shadows of secularism along with the social justice initiatives that are contingent upon their powerless and ineffective approach to redeem America that only the blood of Jesus Christ along with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit can accomplish. Therefore, it is no wonder why America continues to make strides morally for the worse because man is incapable of bringing about the necessary change that strikes at the literal heart of the pandemic of sin. Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark 7:21-23, “For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All of these evils come from inside and defile a person,” and the only remedy to cure this inward and spiritual defilement is through the message of the Gospel, through the Great Commission, through the recognition that all men have sinned and are in need of a Savior, through teaching intentional discipleship, and through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that can circumcise the heart.

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Granted, this research project must take into heavy consideration the fact that many churches in America are not aware of the current statement of problem, and are not having this kind of dialogue addressing how the Great Commission is mission-essential in opposing the age of moral relativism. Additionally, another reason why some do not subscribe to the Great Commission as the answer to America’s secularism (which is difficult to corroborate due to the limited resources available) is simply because many do not believe it to be the ultimate solution, which this project prays they will seriously reconsider the proposed thesis. If a person does not have faith in the commandment itself, they will not be convinced of its effectiveness. As James 2:17 says, “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” If the church in America as a whole are not persuaded that Jesus Christ offered the most fruitful solution to transform the condition of the heart when he charged the apostles to go to all nations and make disciples, not only will many continue to place their hope in other secular movements, but the church will also join with them because of their unfaithful posture towards the Great Commission. Moreover, another reason why many are bypassing the Great Commission as the spiritual remedy to moral relativism that this research strongly believes is preventing Christians from accomplishing pertains to the amount of time that can be involved in making disciples. There is no timetable in teaching intentional discipleship or fulfilling the Great Commission. Discipleship does not generally occur overnight! Instead, to accomplish the five Great Commission essentials mentioned previously will require faith, action, the fruit of patience, and time to allow the Holy Spirit to move in one’s heart to become a true disciple who reciprocates the process. The last part of the missional mandate in Matthew 28:20, which says, “teaching them to obey everything I commanded you” will require time and patience. It is important to be reminded that the original disciples spent approximately three years with the Lord Jesus Christ.
before they were commissioned and endowed with power from on high to fulfill the Great Commission.

So, the proposition this research is delving to defend is not a works-based attempt to riddle the puzzle of moral relativism or to check the box off a list of requirements to counter the impact secularism has made over the historical duration of the nation. No! The primary objective of this project is to bring awareness to the statement of problem, to sound the alarm on the statistical and spiritual decline of the church in America, and to revitalize the eternal ramifications of teaching intentional discipleship and the Great Commission as the ultimate and spiritual means to counter the work of the anti-Christ that can only be achieved by faith in what Jesus commanded almost two thousand years ago; a faith that is accompanied by deeds stimulated by the Great Commission through the Holy Spirit. The motivation of doing this research is first to obey the call to conduct this study and second, to reignite the passion of the church to recommit herself back to the original directive of the Lord’s command, which only God through the precious Holy Spirit can convict this type of rededication. Although this thesis does not in itself possess the saving power to achieve its desired outcome, it is hopeful that God will use the research to arouse some churches in America to recommit themselves back to the Lord’s command, to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”

While the statistics pertaining to the moral and spiritual decline of the church and the nation as a whole are nothing short of heartbreaking, there is still hope. God remains sovereign! Jesus sits at the right-hand throne of the Father in heaven and will return again for His bride, the church. The good news is that all is not lost! According to Frank Newport, God is Alive and Well: The Future of Religion in America written in 2010, he believes that America despite her
increasing pluralism “will become a more religious nation in the years ahead, albeit one that may look a lot different, religiously speaking, than it does today.”

Although more people are subscribing to the “no-religious affiliation” category, and more people are departing mainline denominations, and more non-Christian groups are steadily amassing since he wrote his book in 2010, he may be right that America will continue to be a religious nation that expresses her religiosity in a multitude of ways. However, the one major difference that Newport snubbed in the conclusion of his book was America’s transformation from a Christian nation to a pluralistic nation. The demographic who are now subscribing themselves as non-religious do not disclose what they are currently practicing, if anything at all. Nevertheless, the mounting pluralism in America creates a larger window for the true disciples of Jesus Christ to exercise the Great Commission. The good news of this entire project is that there remains a prospective opportunity to partake in the kingdom of God as America continues down an anti-Christian trajectory. The harvest is plentiful and ripe for the picking! The true disciples of the Lord still have an open door to exercise their small part of the Great Commission. Jesus said in Luke 15:10, “I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Although, the desire of this research project was to reach a multitude of people, the fact that fifteen participants who completed the postquestionnaire will become even more intentional with exercising their faith is mission accomplished. The fact that a book club was orchestrated on Bill Hull’s Complete Book On Discipleship by Deaconess Eleanor in response to the material taught during the eight-week course is mission accomplished. If this project can inspire just one disciple, one sinner, or just one church to commit or recommit to the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Great Commission, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God, and this research will

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have accomplished its objective. So, even in the scenario that America does not climb out of the
dele of relativism, God is still in control, God will still have the victory, the Word of God will
still go forth, and America is still one of the greatest countries to live in the entire planet.
Immaterial to the future state of America, the good news is that the Great Commission of Jesus
Christ is bigger than one nation, and the end of the world will not come until the Gospel is
preached to all nations! The good news is that despite those who have fallen for the trap of moral
relativism, there will remain a remnant in which God preserves who have not bowed the knee to
secularism, who have not bowed the knee to Western culture, who have not bowed the knee to
social justice movements, and who have not bowed the knee to Satan. Lastly, for those that have
not been committed to the Great Commission or were unaware of its eternal ramifications, there
is still another chance to recommit to what Jesus commanded to his original apostles to go and
make disciples. This command is truly the only spiritual cure to treat the spread of America’s
moral relativism, to treat humanity’s inward corruption, to calibrate the mission of the church,
and to help save some from traveling on the wide road that leads to destruction. Therefore, be
encouraged by the words of the Lord Jesus Christ who said at the end of the Great Commission,
“I will be with you until the end of the age!” Do not be afraid!
Appendix A: Prequestionnaire Responses

Please select your age group.
207 responses

- Between the ages of 18-30: 22.7%
- Between the ages of 31-40: 16.4%
- Between the ages of 41-50: 24.2%
- Between the ages of 51-60: 7.7%
- Between the ages of 61-70: 24.2%
- Between the ages of 71-80: 16.4%
- Over the age of 80: 0%

What is your highest level of education?
207 responses

- G.E.D. / High School Diploma: 30%
- Some / Junior College: 24.2%
- Bachelor's Degree: 29%
- Master's / Advanced Degree: 8.7%
- Ph.D / Doctorate: 0%
- Vocational / Trade School: 0%

What is your gender?
208 responses

- Male: 71.6%
- Female: 27.4%
- Prefer not to say: 0%
Do you actively attend a corporate place of worship?
207 responses

- Yes: 59.9%
- No: 17.4%
- Used to: 15%
- Church still closed due to the pandemic: 11.6%

How long have you been attending your current place of worship? (Prior to the pandemic)
202 responses

- Less than 5 years: 12.4%
- Between 6-8 years: 10.4%
- Between 9-12 years: 18.3%
- Between 13-20 years: 11.9%
- Over 20 years: 47%

In your experience with the church, have you experienced any of the following actions:
(Select all that apply)
208 responses

- Under-appreciated: 54 (26%)
- Excommunicated: 9 (4.3%)
- Disfellowshipped: 15 (7.2%)
- Hypocritical leadership: 64 (30.8%)
- Offended by a church member: 71 (34.1%)
- None of the above: 96 (46.2%)
Have you ever left a church or ministry for any of the following reasons? (Select all that apply)
160 responses

- Lack of spiritual growth: 87 (54.4%)
- Style of worship or music: 44 (27.5%)
- Change in leadership: 54 (33.8%)
- Watered-down Gospel message: 29 (18.1%)
- Revenue-centered: 39 (24.4%)
- Church-closure: 16 (9.4%)
- Service too long or too short: 17 (10.5%)
- Too judgmental: 47 (29.4%)
- Moved and didn’t find another c...: 41 (25.6%)

Prior to the pandemic, what is your opinion on the attendance at your personal church?
204 responses

- Rapidly increasing: 27%
- Slowly increasing: 30.4%
- Slowly declining: 21.6%
- Rapidly declining: 3%
- About the same: 2%

Does or did your church offer any of the following programs for the youth? (Check all that apply)
206 responses

- Child Care: 151 (73.3%)
- Sunday School - Elementary Age: 170 (82.5%)
- Middle School (Pre-teen): 141 (68.4%)
- High School / Teen Religious Classes or Education: 131 (63.6%)
- None of the above: 14 (6.8%)
If they do have youth programs, what type of programs are offered? (Check all that apply)
194 responses

- Catechisms: 20 (10.3%)
- Holy Communion: 57 (29.4%)
- Confirmation: 47 (24.2%)
- Sunday School: 164 (84.5%)
- None offered: 22 (11.3%)

Does your church offer any of the following adult religious classes or support? (Check all that apply)
208 responses

- Marital Counseling: 124 (58.6%)
- Bible Study: 184 (86.5%)
- Continuing Religious Education: 85 (41.5%)
- Prayer Sessions / Groups: 173 (84.1%)
- Community Outreach: 161 (77.4%)
- New Believers Small Group: 92 (44.2%)
- Theological Training: 56 (26.9%)
- None Offered: 6 (2.9%)

If your church offers any of these which do you or have you attended. (Check all that apply)
203 responses

- Marital Counseling: 35 (17.2%)
- Bible Study: 156 (76.8%)
- Continuing Religious Education: 49 (24.1%)
- Prayer Sessions / Groups: 130 (64%)
- Community Outreach: 110 (54.2%)
- New Believers Small Group: 30 (14.8%)
- Theological Training: 31 (15.3%)
- None Attended: 15 (7.4%)
- Financial, health, & legal min...: 1 (0.5%)
- Women's retreat & other wo...: 1 (0.5%)
- Disciple Accountability Group: 1 (0.5%)
- As a unit we are not in a pla...: 1 (0.5%)
- Sunday service: 1 (0.5%)
- Advanced theology class: 1 (0.5%)
- Men's Ministry: 1 (0.5%)
- Many home group / small gr...: 1 (0.5%)
- I helped organize woman's g...: 1 (0.5%)
- Sunday School: 1 (0.5%)
- Neighborhood Visits and Out...: 1 (0.5%)
- Movie Nights: 1 (0.5%)
Is there a difference between a Christian and a disciple?
206 responses

- Yes: 42.2%
- No: 20.9%
- It depends: 36.9%

Does God call some to be Christians and some to be disciples?
208 responses

- Yes: 63.9%
- No: 16.3%
- Maybe: 7.7%
- God calls them to be both: 7.7%
- Don't Know: 6.3%

When should Christians exercise the Great Commission?
201 responses

- As one chooses: 79.6%
- Whenever the opportunity presents itself: 11.4%
- It is not necessary to fulfill the Great Commission to be a Christian: 9%
When it comes to the preaching of the Word of God, which of the below do you believe the primary emphasis of the Gospel message should be centered on?

204 responses

- God's love and grace: 23%
- God's holiness and righteousness: 8.8%
- God's overall redemption of his people: 16.7%
- How believers should live their life on earth: 28.4%
- The fallen nature of humanity: 2%
- Repentance of sin: 2%
- Being a disciple of Jesus Christ: 2%
- Being led by the Holy Spirit: 2%

What do you believe is the primary mission for every follower of Jesus?

205 responses

- To live your life how you want: 35.6%
- To follow Jesus: 24.4%
- To achieve all the desires of your heart: 22%
- To go to church: 15.6%
- To provide for your individual family: 2%
- To become a disciple of Jesus: 2%
- To be happy: 2%
- To exercise the Great Commission: 2%
- Obedience to God's Word: 2%

How would you describe the current condition of the "church" in America today?

205 responses

- The church is growing statistically: 24.9%
- The church is spiritually declining: 33.2%
- The church is spiritually declining: 23.4%
- The church is steadily evolving to meet the demands of the culture: 13.2%
- The church is declining statistically: 2%
How would you describe the current condition of America today?

203 responses

If you believe America is declining morally, who do you think is most responsible?

199 responses

In regard to some of the moral controversies prevalent in American culture i.e. LGBTQ, abortion, euthanasia, gender selection, same-sex marriage, etc., do you believe God approves of any of these cultural norms?

206 responses
In regard to America's current political climate, do you believe the country is now headed towards a path of righteousness under a new administration?
206 responses

Do you know the meaning of Moral Relativism?
206 responses

Do you believe America is growing more secular?
207 responses
How much has Satan’s influence (if any) affected the current state of America and the church today?
204 responses

Do you believe the Age of Enlightenment has exerted any of its influence over the past two centuries to the spiritual condition of America today?
201 responses

Do you consider any of the current social justice movements to be the ultimate solution to America’s moral dilemmas?
207 responses

How likely do you believe the Great Commission to be the "ultimate" solution to America’s moral dilemmas? (1 being the less likely and 5 being the most likely)
202 responses
Appendix B: Postquestionnaire Responses

Out of the 8 sessions how many sessions were you able to attend?
15 responses

Since these classes have begun have you been able to return to church?
15 responses

Based on what you learned from these sessions, can a believer be a Christian and not be an actual disciple?
15 responses
What is your understanding of a true disciple of Jesus Christ?

14 responses

Do you think all church programs should have an emphasis on discipleship?

15 responses

Do you have a better understanding of moral relativism?

14 responses
Do you think all church programs should have an emphasis on discipleship?
15 responses

Do you have a better understanding of moral relativism?
14 responses

Since taking these sessions have you changed how often you read your Bible?
15 responses
After careful reflection of this course, do you now believe the Great Commission is the ultimate solution in slowing down the advancement of moral relativism in America?

15 responses

What is the primary mission for every follower of Jesus Christ in the world today?

15 responses

In a few words, what is one thing that stood out to you the most regarding the information you received in this 8-week course?

15 responses

How will you now proceed in your life and in your church with being intentional with discipleship and exercising your part for the Great Commission?

15 responses
Do you have any comments pertaining to the overall course that you would like to share?
15 responses

It was amazing and extremely informative

Glad that I was able to participate. Anytime that I can learn more about my walk in Christ is a blessing

The course was informative and I like that it was recorded allowing the ability to go back and review. The slides were very helpful.

I thoroughly enjoyed being part of this class and I appreciate all of the history that was taught. I learned a lot about discipleship and being a disciple. Thank you God Bless!

None - enjoyed the class and the information

I loved it! I learned so much.

It was amazing, it should be put on video and sent all Across the world. There is so many different teachings but this course was the true gospel!!

Do you have any comments pertaining to the overall course that you would like to share?
15 responses

This is the first time I ever take classes on discipleship, classes were very informative and somewhat do some soul searching.

I greatly appreciate the amount of work and study that you put into this course. I have a better understanding and appreciation for behind the scenes work. Thank you so much.

It was a great class and I learn a lot that I needed to know

I enjoyed it

I think this course was an Awakening to what we as Christians have forgotten to exercise in our walk in Christ. our primary goal in Christ is to make disciples. We must Look INTENTIONALLY for every opportunity to witness. I know this course has made a difference in my life, opening up my eyes and understanding of what true discipleship really is and just how important the great Commission is. Thank you Pastor David Martinez

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The course was profound and should be shared again.
Bibliography


